ON ROWING

BY

STEVE FAIRBAIRN

rowperfect

With a new introduction and notes by

Peter Mallory

VOLUME II
of Four

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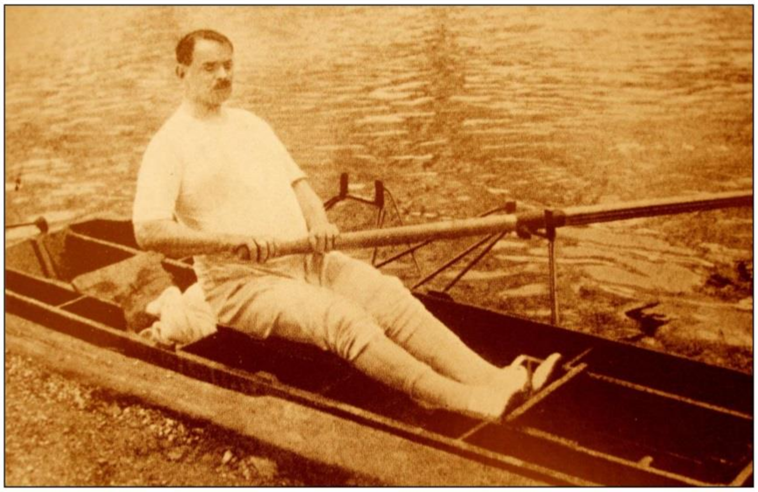
STEVE FAIRBAIRN: ICONOCLAST

Regardless of it being trite and potentially blasphemous, it is very difficult to resist the temptation to compare **Steve Fairbairn** to the Biblical Messiah.

Both are referred to by their first name.
Steve rowed for Jesus College, Cambridge.
A religion welled up around both of these charismatic individuals.
Both were rejected by most of their contemporaries.
Both remained controversial and polarizing during their lives and for years after their deaths.
Both had disciples who gathered together their sayings so they could be passed on to future generations.

“First a man must understand thoroughly what rowing is.” So began Steve’s first published work, “Rowing Notes”, in 1904. I suggest to you, a fresh, new generation of his readers, that if understanding rowing is truly your goal: “First a person must understand thoroughly who Steve Fairbairn is.”

Today if people imagine Steve Fairbairn the man, they probably think of the famous 1926 portrait of him by James Quinn at the front of these volumes. It still hangs in Jesus College, Cambridge, and it shows a distinguished middle-aged gentleman of leisure in Cambridge blazer and Leander scarf meeting your gaze with a Mona Lisa smile.

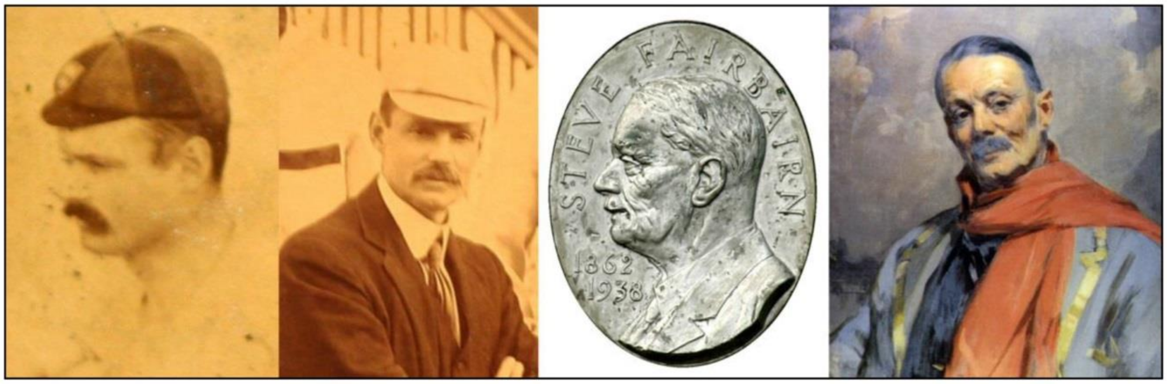


Rowing Notes (1926)

Steve

Or one might conjure the image of Steve demonstrating some aspect of technique in one of the many illustrations from his books, in his 60s, overweight, in white shirt, pants and shoes.

But I think it is crucial to remember that decades before he became a coach Steve was a very handsome and extremely vigorous young man.



A descendent of generations of exceptional athletes, Fairbairn spent his secondary school years at Geelong Grammar School, near Melbourne in the Australian State of Victoria, and to say that he excelled in cricket, Australian Rules football, track, swimming, gymnastics and rowing would be a pitiful understatement.

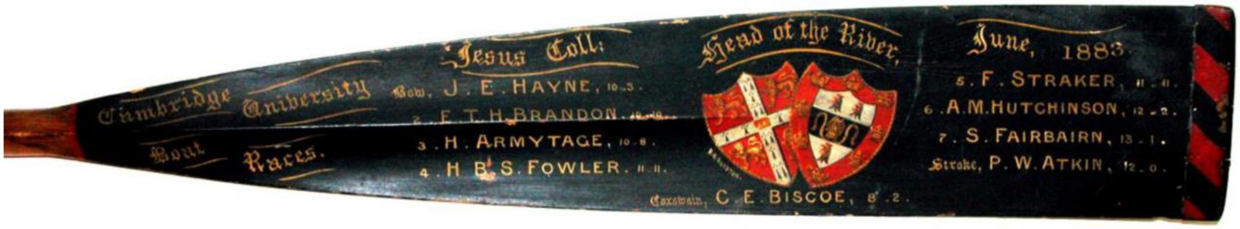
At the age of 14, he walked across the near wilderness of Tasmania with his brother and a cousin, making 90 miles in their first 37 hours. That set the tone for the rest of his extraordinary life.

In the fall of 1881, he became the fifth of six brothers to enroll at Jesus College, Cambridge, in England. Shortly after his arrival, on a bet, in 23 hours he canoed from Putney to Henley, 62 miles including a detour, through locks, against the current and into a headwind. Unfortunately, he never collected on the wager.

He was a demi-god, a very large man for his time, well built, over 6’0” and 13 stone 7 lbs. On the first day of term at Cambridge, he won the freshman championship at hammer throw and shot-put.

Perhaps partially explaining his prickly personality in later years, River & Rowing Museum historian **Christopher Dodd** recounts that on his second day at Cambridge, “he had a head-on collision with another sculler, the other boat striking him within an inch of his spine. Two feet of its bow broke off and were left sticking into Steve, and he reckoned that he had a blood cyst for thirty-five years after this as a result of the doctor not getting all the bits of wood out of his back. It caused him a lot of pain and nervous dyspepsia, to which he was a self-confessed martyr ever onwards.”

Throughout his life, Steve Fairbairn never lacked for self-confidence. On his first day rowing for Jesus, he personally took over from Captain **Arthur M. Hutchinson** and made the team his own. By the time he had completed his studies five years later in 1887, Steve and Hutch together had rowed Jesus College twenty-five times to Head of the River in the May University Bumps.



Thomas E. Weil Collection

Fairbairn: “I won the Grand in 1885 with the College May Boat, the only time that has been done. All other winning College crews have had old hands to strengthen them.”

“Hutchinson and I rowed in over a hundred races at 7 and 6 in Eights and 3 and 2 in Fours. We were only beaten once when rowing 7 and 6, and that was in ‘87 in the final of the Grand, which we lost by eighteen inches.

“We were beaten five times in Eights and Fours out of over a hundred races, and we did not have the pick of men with us, like Leander.”

Steve and Hutch became lifelong friends, dying within five months of each other in the late 1930s.

In 1886, Fairbairn agreed to rejoin the Cambridge Blue Boat in the 5-seat after a two-year absence, immediately rerigged the boat to his specifications and transformed the way they rowed. They won in a thrilling race, and as the nine men dispersed, so did Steve’s innovations, quickly to Leander Club and soon also to Oxford University.

Journalist and rowing historian **Geoffrey Page**: “Steve did not confine his coaching to Jesus, and the extent of his influence can be judged by the remarkable results at Henley in 1886 and 1887. Steve claimed that, in these two years, the winners of every race at Henley, with the sole exception of the London Eight that won the Thames Cup in 1886, had been through his hands and were all rowing on the principles he taught.” He was still an undergraduate at the time.

Fairbairn’s innovations during the mid-1880s sparked a true Golden Age of British Rowing, and all this twenty years before Steve became a coach!

Steve was one of the great oars of his era . . . but not the greatest. In his 1886 Cambridge Blue Boat at stroke sat **Freddie Pitman**, Eton College and 3rd Trinity, who won the Diamond Sculls three months later. Sitting in front of Steve in the 6-seat was **Stanley Duff Muttlebury**, Eton and 3rd Trinity, visibly taller and heavier than Steve, who would go on to win the Boat Race four times. In 1887, Muttle and his teammate, Blue Boat 7-seat C. T. Barclay, also Eton and 3rd Trinity, beat Fairbairn and Hutchinson in the elimination heats for the Silver Goblets race for pairs at Henley.

Vanity Fair

Stanley Duff Muttlebury

Perhaps here lies an opening into which we can peer into Steve Fairbairn's inner mind. As an athlete, he was close, but he never reached the absolute pinnacle. As an outsider, not from Eton College, the birthplace of rowing as sport, indeed as a foreigner from the very fringe of the British Empire, with his unmistakable foreign accent and the unrefined language of the Australian hinterlands, Steve got neither the respect nor the credit he deserved for his contributions to British rowing during his rowing career. When he returned to Australian in 1887, there was still unfinished business in his life, rowing business, and it would only be a matter of time before he returned to settle scores.

After he did return nearly two decades later to become coach of Jesus College Boat Club, he spent the rest of his life railing against the English rowing establishment which had wronged him in his youth.

Olympic Champion Coach **Mike Spracklen**: “Steve was a controversial character who loved an argument – particularly with the exponents of English Orthodoxy.”

Steve's son, **Ian Fairbairn**: “In all this controversy . . . Steve saw . . . what seemed to him the undue and irritating resistance of traditionalists to all change. It confirmed and widened his critical attitude towards orthodoxy, and encouraged in him a disposition to favour change almost for the sake of change.”

British Olympic Champion rower and Boat Race coach **Jumbo Edwards**: “I always felt that Steve in his engaging, mischievous way wrote his books not to be taken too literally but to give the oarsman food for thought and to rectify the exaggerations of Orthodoxy.”

The late Harvard coach **Harry Parker**: “You have to make an allowance for the fact that Steve was fighting a religion, and you have to overstate things to get your point across. He had a lot of it really right, but he overstated some of it.”

Spracklen: “Steve introduced his own ideas, and his crews were successful, but instead of respect for his achievements, he found himself under attack from the English coaches. They disliked his criticism of their style, and it is evident that there was some envy of his success.

“Fairbairn was unforgiving with his criticism of the way they rowed. His outspoken and provocative comments annoyed the English coaches, who defended the way they rowed vehemently. But Fairbairn’s success gave him confidence and his criticisms increased, which served only to drive the two sides further apart. The press jumped on to the bandwagon, which only escalated the antagonism between the two sides.”

Geoffrey Page: “He was frequently accused of ruining English rowing, mainly by what he termed the ‘Orthodox Brigade’. He always had a ready answer to his critics, of course, and in one of the many letters he wrote to my father [James Houghton “Freddie” Page, 1900-1977, Jesus College, master and coach at St. Paul’s School, London, 5-times captain of Thames Rowing Club, coach of both the Oxford and Cambridge Blue Boats.] between 1923 and his death, he said, ‘People have said to me: “If that is rowing, I don’t know anything about rowing.” To which I have replied, “I never said you did.”’ . . . ”

The list of issues concerning rowing technique that Steve Fairbairn raised and addressed at the beginning of the 20th Century has not been expanded in all the years since. He had already identified and discussed in detail every aspect of technique that a modern coach must also deal with, and almost every single choice he made has strong and successful adherents in today’s international rowing field. In fact, between 85% and 95% of 21st Century World and Olympic finalists can trace the roots of their rowing technique directly back to Steve Fairbairn!

Tom Terhaar, coach of the 2008 and 2012 Olympic Champion U.S. Women’s Eight: “I still read Fairbairn on occasion, just pick it up and open to a random page. It gives me perspective like a breath of fresh air.”

Steve is as relevant today as he was in his own era.

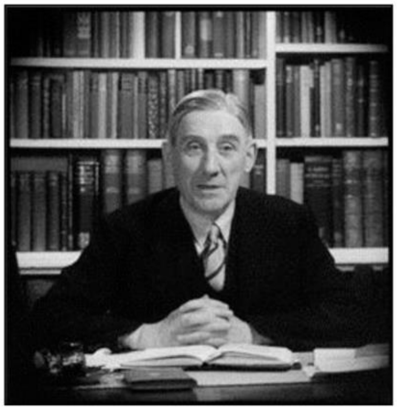
Peter Mallory
Old Oar Cottage
2014

The editor of the 2013-14 eBook presentation of the complete works of Steve Fairbairn is **Peter Mallory**, author of ***The Sport of Rowing***, published in four volumes in 2011 by The River and Rowing Museum in Henley-on-Thames, England. More information on Mr. Mallory may be obtained at www.rowingevolution.com.

SLOWLY FORWARD

366 points for oarsmen,
coxswains and coaches,
from the writings of
Steve Fairbairn
selected and arranged by

FREDDY BRITTAIN
(1929)



National Portrait Gallery
Frederick Brittain

eBook Edition 2014
www.rowperfect.co.uk

NOTE

A *Times* reviewer asserted recently that "rowing in this country owes more to Mr. Fairbairn than to any other man."

Steve's success as a coach is well known, and is freely admitted even by critics of "the Fairbairn style". Their attitude is tempered by a recognition of facts, well expressed in Mr. R.E. Swartwout's verses on Steve in his *Rhymes of the River*:

We know that curious style of his
Is most completely wrong;
But for all his leg-drive heresy
His boats *do* get along.

Part of Steve's success with his crews may perhaps be attributed to the fact that he can compress more instructions into a single epigrammatic phrase than many a coach can convey by a lecture involving a delay of several minutes to his own boat and probably to a string of several other boats.

In these pages the reader will find a "Fairbairnism" for each day of the year. Most of the quotations are brief and will stick in the memory. Some of them are addressed directly to the oarsman, others to the coxswain, others to the coach; but they are really addressed to all three classes, directly or indirectly.

Most of the quotations are from Steve's published writings, the remainder from his manuscript notes and letters. Except where a sequence of ideas is inevitable, they are arranged in such a way that the subject changes from day to day, thus making the series of points more useful for coaching purposes.

If any justification is considered necessary for the fact that the same or a very similar point recurs under different dates, it will be found under May 20th and August 2nd.

F.B.

Cambridge, 1929

[**Frederick Brittain**, 1893-1969, a don at Jesus College Cambridge, was a member of Fairbairn's inner circle. In 1930 he wrote "Oar, Scull and Rudder", the first comprehensive bibliography of rowing literature, with an introduction by Steve Fairbairn. He also wrote "The Jesus College Boat Club, Cambridge" with **Humphrey Blake Playford**, 1896-1981, Jesus College, Boat Race Winner 1920, '21, '22, in 1928, and he wrote the eulogy for Fairbairn published in *The Cambridge Review* in 1938. Refer to "The Don's List", *http://www.rowinghistory.net/don's_list.htm*, by historian **Thomas E. Weil**. – P.M.]

JANUARY

1. (*New Year's Day*.) Don't start the next stroke too soon.

2. The best results are got by exaggerating the points where the oarsman is most likely to fail.

3. Always be ready for a spurt.

4. Spring off the stretcher as fast as you can, and on no account reduce the leg-drive to stop fast sliding.

5. If you can't do it easily, you can't do it at all.

6. The dreamier a crew looks, the nearer it approaches to the poetry of motion.

7. Think for yourself and work in a natural manner.

8. Test a man's utility and earnestness by his blade-work, the manner in which the blade of his oar stirs the water.

9. Rowing means pushing the water past the boat. It makes no real difference in principle whether we say it is that or say that it is pushing the boat past the water.

10. No movements of the crew in the boat can make it progress or retard it any more than one can make a bus go from London to Oxford by merely running about inside it.

11. It is a mistake to make an oarsman think consciously about his body.

12. An oarsman makes hundreds of movements during his life similar to all the movements of the body throughout the stroke, and he ought to be able to make the movements of rowing without being told how.

13. A high blade means a true springy strike on to the balance.

14. Read "Notes on Rowing", and read them frequently, to get the constant repetition of principles which makes the book like a rowing coach.

15. A man's success as an oar will depend on the amount of thought he gives to the subject.

16. Keenness and enthusiasm are everything in a coach.

17. (*St. Anthony, Patron of Butchers*.) Let the blade lead all through the stroke.

18. If the oarsman is properly controlled in his swing, he will not hit the front stop.

19. Hands, body, slide, is the order of timing. The movements should be as natural as when picking up a piece of paper.

20. (*St. Vitus*.) Let the subjective mind control all the movements of the body unconsciously.

21. The longer the oar is held balanced on the feather the better.

22. The Cox must be the voice of the Stroke and express his messages to the crew on the instant that he reads the thought upon Stroke's face.

23. Spring from the stretcher and row the blade in.

24. Enjoy your rowing, win or lose.

25. Oarsmen, especially beginners, vary the draw much more than most people think.

26. Swivels are much better rowing appliances than fixed rowlocks.

27. Try to squeeze the button through the rowlock at each end of the stroke.

28. The education of an oarsman should never be allowed to become stereotyped.

29. (*St. Francis de Sales, Patron of Journalists*.) The important thing in reading about rowing is not to swallow everything as though it were gospel truth.

30. If the oarsman rows his oar in one plane the boat can't roll.

31. Cox is too often overlooked. He is almost the most important man in the boat.

FEBRUARY

1. The oarsman who swings with the main idea of showing the coach how long he can swing, and the coach who shouts at him to swing the body farther, are both on the wrong track.

2. Every movement should always be made as cleverly as possible.

3. (*St. Blaise, Protector of the Throat*.) The Cox must shout loudly enough for Bow to hear him.

4. An apparent slight hang is no harm in a crew. They don't hang really, but they are taking time to gather and strike.

5. Try to jerk the cox out of the boat.

6. The "needle" [Overexcitement before a race. – P.M.] is apt to be cumulative, and the more one races the more one gets it.

7. The harder the downward stroke at the finish, the lighter the action feels. This movement is the key to good rowing.

8. The swirl of the water at the finish shows much more in a moving boat than in a fixed tub.

9. If rowing can be made to seem easy, it will be easy.

10. On no account hold the back stiffly and consciously flat.

11. A very good exercise is to row without straps in a tub pair.

12. Row the blade straight home in one plane.

13. Row to your strong point. There is a limit to the forward reach for effective work.

14. (*St. Valentine*.) Orthodoxy is particularly severe on keeping the eyes in the boat. This not only turns the body into cast-iron, but also paralyses the mind.

15. Everybody ought to start by sculling.

16. Driving the back out round is what gives the appearance of shortness, but it gives real length.

17. A man can be taught a lot by being made to row in a wrong way, as an illustration of how not to do it.

18. The underlying principles of rowing are the same as in all athletics; viz., timing, control, balance, and touch.

19. Timing can only be got by taking time; hurrying is fatal.

20. Control means keeping the body braced firmly, that is, taut, all the time.

21. Balance means keeping the boat on the point of balance, and this is done by keeping an even and controlled weight on the handle of the oar, feeling the blade balanced evenly in the air on the sill of the rowlock all through the swing.

22. Touch means delicacy and cleverness in doing every act.

23. The only true way to begin and to row is to have the slides unlimited in length.

24. The easier and lazier the swing looks, the faster and truer it is.

25. (*St. Victorinus, Patron of Apothecaries*.) A “raw beginner” is a term which may be applied to a promising novice without necessarily suggesting the application of vaseline anywhere.

26. The oar must be held controlled all the way when coming forward.

27. It is better to row with your eyes shut than to keep them glued on the head of the man in front of you.

28. The cox can do a lot to balance the boat by keeping his body taut and well braced.

29. (*Leap Year Day*.) After rowing a couple of strokes, he said: “Let us talk to those girls.” This gave me the reason why he was turned out of the crew the previous term.

MARCH

1. One need not confine one's reading to books that one agrees with.

2. Differences in methods of teaching are merely relying on different points to attain the same object. It is like two men climbing a tree from opposite sides. Let them both go on climbing.

3. The blade is the only index that can be read as to what work is being done.

4. The art of moving a boat is a thing which grows with the years, if one keeps at it seriously.

5. (*St. Drausinus, Patron of Pugilists*.) What catches the eye is not motion but the checking of motion after a jerky action.

6. The bell note gives life, and the blade cutting through evenly gives length.

7. The reaction of the water on the blade is what moves the boat.

8. Making no apparent effort on the forward swing is the hall-mark of a good oarsman.

9. When the oar is on the feather, keep the blade well off the water, so as to allow it to be squared without touching the water.

10. Spring on to the beginning, so as to make the boat jump in its stride and punch cox in the back.

11. Get a crew to row a piece with bent arms; it is one of the best exercises to give them. It teaches them how to draw the weight evenly, and makes the draw a true regulator.

12. The beginning of the movement of getting the hands away is to start turning the blade on the feather just before the finish of the stroke.

13. Energy is lost in the rattle of the oars in a fixed rowlock, and it is a false notion to time the stroke by this sound.

14. The body must not be held rigid like a piece of cast-iron.

15. It is by confidence alone that one will become a good oarsman, and confidence can only follow knowledge.

16. Many young oarsmen think of the hands going forward in a straight line, with the result that they fail to maintain the lateral pressure.

17. From the moment one gets into the boat until one leaves it, the oar should be held controlled, and the body taut and truly balanced.

18. The more one tries to let the muscles rest on the forward swing and trust to the run of the boat to bring one forward, the better will be the swing.

19. Every stroke has a keynote depending on the pace at which the boat was propelled by the last stroke, and according to that keynote the oarsman should regulate the stroke.

20. When one feels lost in a rolling boat, one had better stop trying to row a full stroke, get a rest, and be ready for the next stroke.

21. To call out “Three, you are rushing,” will only result in making him hurry more.

22. The men rowing on each side of the boat are as much coordinated in the same machine as the two hands of a man who is sculling.

23. If an oarsman asks for his work to be raised it has often been found to be much more satisfactory to lower it. This is one of the many anomalies of rowing.

24. (*St. William, Patron of Hammerers*.) The crew are nothing but a human hammer driving the boat with a hit.

25. (*St. Dismas, Protector against Thieves*.) Pick the weak point of a crew rather than of an individual.

26. Mileage makes Champions.

27. One does not need to win a race to get enjoyment.

28. It is a reversal of the natural sequence to start instruction with a description of the style of a finished oarsman and to tell the novice to make himself look like that.

29. The first outing in an eight should be as early as possible in the schedule of training.

30. Many a man has lost his Blue from being one-sided.

31. The oarsman is a human rowing machine, and the more he practises using his oar correctly the better rowing machine he will become.

APRIL

1. (*All Fools' Day*.) There should be brains in the blade throughout the stroke.

2. Don't get into controversies on style, as language is far too imperfect a medium to express ideas.

3. Any man rows better in his tenth year than in his fifth, and in his twentieth than in his tenth.

4. The blade should be turned square just before the end of the Forward swing.

5. "Poise" is as good a coaching cry as "Slowly forward."

6. Try to climb the oar as you grip the water.

7. The swivel, being close round the oar, is always handling the oar knowingly; while the slip in the fixed rowlock must amount to yards of distance lost over a long course.

8. Flick the blade out with a light hand; not a gingery, nervous movement, but a lightning dash.

9. Finish the stroke out, and you will be more likely to get the timing correct for the next stroke.

10. The forward swing should be very smooth, even so as to look lazy and languid, concealing by its ease the oarsman's control of his body.

11. Life must be the leading motive, and length a secondary object, although important.

12. No machine – and the oarsman is only a human machine – can get 100 per cent. of effectiveness from any movement.

13. The anxiety to win a race is very apt to defeat its object and make the oarsman rush and scramble.

14. The anxiety of a coach or cox to point out faults and tell a man what he is doing wrong always makes the fault worse.

15. (*St. Elmo, Patron of Coxswains*.) The cox can do much for a crew by bringing out his commands with an alertness which suggests life, control, discipline and enthusiasm.

16. As you think and try, so you will improve.

17. Every stroke well rowed will not only improve the oarsman and tend to make each succeeding stroke better, but it also reacts on the crew.

18. Draw with the hands as hard as possible, letting the shoulders move as freely as they want to, and the elbow joints bend as soon as necessary.

19. Give a thought to the circular movement of the oar, and keep your lateral pressure going.

20. The first outing upon the water should be taken as an opportunity for explaining the elements of balance.

21. It is every man’s job to balance the boat; but it is much easier to bring the boat down than up.

22. To make sure that the stroke is rowed out, watch the blade and see that it is rowed out.

23. The beginner rarely, if ever, realises how he can improve by concentration and trying to do better every stroke.

24. One does not want to load the oarsman’s mind with arguments on the dubious mathematical explanations of how he applies his work.

25. Never sacrifice work to appearance; but of course style is effect, and honest hard work will give true style eventually.

26. Use your legs from the very start.

27. (*St. Zita, Patroness of Housemaids*.) Let the knees rise easily and naturally just before they feel constrained.

28. Give yourself time, especially at the two turns.

29. Don’t let your body flop about, especially when the boat is easied and the coach is giving instructions.

30. (*Sir Henry Bishop, composer of “Home, sweet home”, died 1855*.) There’s no place like the boat to coach from.

MAY

1. My real book on rowing would be: “Learn to drive your blade through the water to perfection,” and that sentence repeated to the thousandth page and throughout the next volume.

2. Try rowing with the arms bending naturally.

3. To flick the blade into the air, the hands must be rowed down. The action is firm and swift; it should not be a rude bang.

4. At the finish the oarsman should feel the boat running out from under him with the pace given by the final whip of the stroke.

5. When the oarsman is told to row as easily as possible, he must not slouch.

6. A boat launched and manned smartly has a crew in the right humour to row her.

7. Imagine that the run of the boat brings you forward, and so eliminate effort.

8. Square the blade and poise before rowing it into the water.

9. Concentrate on your blade, and trust your natural instinct and habit to move your body in the best way.

10. In tubbing practise, the tub should be rowed forward and back in short pieces near to the men who are waiting their turn, so that they may listen to the explanations given by the coach and take example from the efforts of others.

11. To quicken, shorten. Then you will quicken and lengthen.

12. Find out how to use your weight and you will have solved the problem of how to move the boat.

13. To keep one’s body under control and the boat properly balanced is a duty which one owes towards the rest of the crew.

14. Open the hands, let the weight rest on the handle, and float forward balanced ready to square the blade and spring.

15. Take care of the blade, and the body will take care of itself.

16. There has always been a feeling against skying the blade, but I like the blade-skyer.

17. The blade-skyer is balancing his oar on the sill without a doubt. He is not afraid to

leave the water alone, and he must have struck sharply on the balance. Of course, I am not giving approval to the practise of skying the blade just before turning it square or after slithering it along the water.

18. The delicacy of touch to be aimed at should be such that the hardest beginning is entirely controlled.

19. Every man must try to find out for himself how a thing is to be done.

20. In coaching, it is necessary to repeat the main points frequently.

21. Pick the weak point of a crew and work round on it in many different ways.

22. Smoothness in the machinery gets more power out of team-work, and it comes naturally by letting the machine work without interruption.

23. The higher the blade is struck on the balance the firmer the strike from the balance will be when the oar takes the water at the beginning of the next stroke.

24. Put both feet firmly on the stretcher, keeping a firm pressure on it always, coming forward as well as going back.

25. Each man should show, by his manner of taking his place and doing his part on the word of command, that his services are at the disposal of the crew.

26. When the crew have to lift the boat down from the racks, the best practise is for each man to be on the side of his own rigger when the boat is the right way up.

27. Nine hundred and ninety-nine strokes in a thousand are never rowed out because the oarsman is rushing for the next stroke.

28. Always sit with body taut and oar firmly controlled.

29. A rowing style with a noisy exhaust seems to be doing more than it really is.

30. As one point improves others will improve also.

31. The cox has to discharge the independent responsibility of steering the boat and choosing the course with quick decision and generalship.

JUNE

1. Hold the oar so that it rests on the forward part only of the flat of the loom on which it is balanced on the rigger.
2. Although the hands move the oar forward balanced in one plane, the feeling should be as if one were floating out forward balanced on the oar, and the oar drawing one forward.
3. By coaching for length, the quick application of power may be lost sight of, and a dull drag will set in.
4. It is fear that rolls a boat, and if the crew tried boldly to roll the boat themselves it would eliminate the fear.
5. Directing a man’s conscious mind towards his body and making him think actively of how he should posture himself is not only a long way to get him to do the thing required but is also the wrong way.
6. The mind is apt to think that the blade is square before it is.
7. Acquire the habit of taking a rest in a position of control.
8. Actively balancing the boat at the slightest sign of any instability is done by varying the weight on the handle instinctively.
9. Skying the blade just before turning it square shows an entire lack of balance.
10. In coaching, keep on varying the expressions and metaphors until one or another flashes the true picture on the mind of the oarsman.
11. The work of an oarsman with a perfect action would seem to be done by invisible means in a Rolls-Royce style.
12. Each man should show by his action that his team-sense is developed.
13. The “Lift! Lower!” exercise is the best I know for teaching balance.
14. The coach should ask the cox to try to roll the boat, and the crew will then see how they can hold the boat firm.
15. If possible, let all the crew go sculling in whiffs and practise “Holding her hard.”
16. In striking on to the balance the handle of the oar should be struck downwards as if one were trying to break the oar across the sill of the rowlock.

17. Pick the weak point of a crew and make it the main point for several days.

18. The long point and the strong point would only coincide in a perfect oarsman; and he has not been born yet.

19. The crew need reminding that when starting the race one does not want to try to do too much.

20. Changing from “paddling light” to “paddling firm” and “rowing” is like changing gears in a motor car, and gives the oarsman control over body and oar.

21. Make all the movements naturally, and never exaggerate.

22. Learn sculling in off times or whilst waiting for your turn at tubbing.

23. Long paddles are best for making men get together, sink their differences, and overcome their troubles without checking the even run of the boat.

24. Making individuals in a crew worry about themselves is putting grains of sand in the bearings.

25. Always back up the man in front of you, taking the weight off him as much as possible.

26. The run of a boat varies at every stroke, and Stroke and crew must vary accordingly.

27. The more crews can be galloped together in practise the better.

28. Trying to do too much is very apt to bring in rush and effort; and one man doing this will spoil the whole crew.

29. Turn the blade with as little wrist-work as possible, and especially see that the wrist does not sag.

30. A cox can make a tremendous difference to a crew by his steering, and by the way he sits in a boat, as well as by his calls to the crew.

JULY

1. A good exercise is to row with the arms straight, and never bend them, finishing with the arms perfectly straight. It teaches one to let the shoulders play freely, it teaches one to strike on to the balance truly, and it teaches a true body-swing.

2. The weight applied by the inside hand should strike the oar on to the balance. In fact, the inside hand should do all the control.

3. Hold the body and oar firmly controlled all through the stroke.

4. Though style is effect, to get it at the expense of hard work is obviously a mistake.

5. If the oarsman realises that he can make the movements of the hands, body, and knees correctly because he has done so hundreds of times during his life, it will give him confidence.

6. (*St. Julian, Patron of Boatmen*.) Watch your rigger and prevent it from being injured by a knock when the boat is carried out.

7. The coach’s first duty is to get the boat steady.

8. At first the oarsman thinks that if he is passing the trees the boat is going faster than anyone ever rowed a boat before. From the passing-the-trees stage he gets to rowing a stroke occasionally without the boat rolling.

9. The mind is apt to think that the body is gathered ready to strike before it is.

10. A rest should not be taken by flinging the oar away and leaning one hand on the side of the boat.

11. The higher the blade is struck on the balance, the more the hands control the oar.

12. Never easy a boat after the first few days of practise more than you can help.

13. Getting the crew all in together is best for the boat.

14. A crew that can do the “Lift! Lower!” exercise properly will never let a boat roll.

15. Getting every man to learn how to paddle light is the most essential practise of all.

16. When called upon to spurt, let each man be sure he strikes quicker and harder, even if shorter.

17. There is only one style of rowing. Good rowing will beat bad rowing from one yard upwards; and the farther the distance the more good rowing will triumph.

18. The action is becoming more natural and easy throughout the English rowing world, and consequently truer.

19. (*St. Vincent de Paul, Patron of Galley-slaves*.) I have seen many a bow four earning the race by their good paddling-on in practise.

20. With the weight of the lower part of the body driven out, and the back driven out like a piece of rounded whalebone, the shoulders, back, and slide all move harmoniously.

21. The “lively recovery” is a showy fallacy, and a deadly enemy to oarsmen and rowing.

22. The arms must be alive, not locked, and keep drawing the oar in.

23. Keep moving naturally and unconsciously and concentrate on working the blade.

24. Take it quite easily.

25. (*St. Christopher, Patron of Ferrymen*.) The coach should show how to stop a boat. He must explain how the oar has to be sliced in and gradually turned square.

26. Mental staleness will set in if the work is monotonous and dull.

27. Make the handicap very level in a practise race. If either crew must be favoured, always flatter the colt.

28. Just lean back against the rowing-pins.

29. The old fear that drawing at the oar with the arms tires them is a fallacy.

30. As the weak point strengthens in a crew, it will be apt to strengthen more in those of the crew who are weakest.

31. The cox should fix himself in the boat so as to be as nearly immovable as possible.

AUGUST

1. The best way to apply one’s weight right through the stroke is to let the shoulders and arms play as feels most natural and unstrained.

2. The oarsman does not take a point in from being told once or from reading it once.

3. A coach cannot tell his crew too often to rest and float forward.

4. An oarsman can easily tell if he is overreaching; the stroke feels to drag heavily.

5. The mind is apt to think that the stroke is finished before it is. Sit back.

6. One can sit upright easily in a position of rest.

7. A high blade means a correspondingly true strike from the balance.

8. (*St. Hormisdas, Protector of Camels*.) Many first-class oars have had round backs.

9. By “paddling light” I do not mean rowing the blade so that half of it is visible. I mean drawing it through with less pressure.

10. (*St. Lawrence, Protector of the Back*.) If the oarsman concentrates on blade-work as the end to be aimed at, his body-form will not commit errors of substance.

11. The body must be bellied out like a sail to get the full weight applied.

12. Locking the elbow joint to keep the arm straight is fatal.

13. The coach should give the crew the variations of length for “paddling light”, “paddling firm”, and “rowing”.

14. Give the crew some rowing with the outside hand off when coming forward.

15. Tub about twice a week in long spells, and give a new exercise each time.

16. (*St. Roch, Protector against Sores*.) Fixed seats are an abomination, and should be done away with. One wants to make rowing pleasant; one does not want to have men eating their breakfast off the mantelpiece.

17. Lay special stress on making the blade cut truly on the light paddle.

18. Ring the changes from “paddle light” to “paddle firm” and to “row”, drop to “light” and up to “row”, letting them row ten strokes, and give the crew twenty strokes of

rowing before an easy.

19. It is very much easier to learn how to row a stroke correctly in a fixed tub than in a moving tub or in a four or eight. Therefore the fixed tub is the best place to start to learn to row.

20. Make the blade ring true as it strikes the water.

21. Bring the water up swirling as the blade is rowed out and flicked into the air truly balanced.

22. Plenty of long rows are the best way to learn.

23. The coach ought to find time to coach the cox in the important details of giving words of command.

24. The more the true movements become stereotyped in the fixed tub, the more easily will they be eventually produced in moving boats.

25. (*St. Louis, Patron of Barbers*.) One can tell instinctively by sound and feel whether the blade is being brought through at the right depth.

26. Take long rows and plenty of fixed tubbing, both on both sides whenever possible.

27. The cox should never call to individuals to correct the time.

28. When a man is rowing he is learning, and when out of the boat he is forgetting.

29. Keep the blade balanced in the air with an even weight, so that it moves forward in one plane.

30. Never coach to drive the back out, but to work the blade as hard and as far as possible.

31. The cox is an understudy to the coach.

SEPTEMBER

1. Keep the legs and back at work right through the stroke, and end it with a final whip to the oar. That gives pace to the boat.

2. No exertion is needed for holding the oar controlled at all times.

3. A high blade means a well-controlled and balanced oar.

4. Keep the oarsman thinking actively.

5. Paddling light, paddling firm, and rowing should be much the same as getting into first, second, and third gears.

6. With the straight back the shoulders are farther past the belly. This looks longer than when the back is driven freely out, but is not as long, as powerful, or as easy in action.

7. Make the blade cut evenly and continuously through the water.

8. Give the cox “communication-drill” to test and exercise his voice.

9. Keep the button pressing against the rowlock always.

10. One can tell pretty well how an oarsman will shape by the way he steps into a boat.

11. The more one rows in a fixed tub the more the right muscles are being conditioned, and consequently the more the movements will be made truly.

12. Keep a lateral pressure on the oar all through the stroke, so that the button never loses touch with the rowlock.

13. Look for the swirl of the water as much as you like, but you should eventually be able to recognise that the blade is indexing truly by the feel.

14. (*St. Albert, Patron of Cutlers*.) Feel the blade in your hands.

15. Start turning the blade on to the feather just before flicking it into the air.

16. The turns at the finish and beginning are sleight-of-hand tricks. They are so complicated that they need plenty of time.

17. The only time to speak to an individual is when he shows improvement.

18. The more oily a crew is, the more life there is; but the less apparent it is. A

perfect oar would appear not to move.

19. Square the blade just before rowing it into the water.

20. In the fixed tub the blade rows about eleven feet through the water against eighteen inches or so in an eight, and so the muscles get more exercise.

21. Teaching rowing is the best way to learn it.

22. Working two crews together is the best way to concentrate their attention.

23. Bring the blade through always at the same depth – just covered.

24. When squaring the blade, make sure that the bottom of the loom of the oar is placed firmly against the thole and held controlledly there all through the stroke.

25. The heaviest and hardest work for yourself as well as for the man in front of you is when you are just a fraction late.

26. It is of the greatest importance to get each oarsman to understand what rowing is, and to have the whole crew or club of one mind.

27. (*St. Cosmas, Patron of Doctors*.) Nobody would regret the pains which he had to take to ascend to the higher plane of first-class rowing.

28. Always begin tubbing by letting men row singly.

29. The oar should be gripped firmly but delicately. It should be the firm, steely grip of the fencer.

30. (*St. Jerome, Patron of Learning*.) We can all always learn.

OCTOBER

1. Place the oarsmen and the crews as nearly as possible in order of merit at the very beginning of the season.

2. If by “teaching to swing” is meant moving the body harmoniously, it is better to begin on a slide, because the movements have to be synchronised differently from a fixed seat.

3. (*St. Denis, the Neoplatonist*.) One can never really row. I mean, one can never become a perfect example of an oarsman; one can only illustrate in a boat what one thinks rowing is.

4. In coaching, vary the cry as much as possible.

5. To get the longest stroke and the least tiring position, the belly must be drawn in, and the small of the back rowed well out.

6. The lateral pressure can be exaggerated as much as one likes at the two turns, and the result will merely be a livelier spring in the movement of the oar at each end of the stroke.

7. Try to climb your oar when forward, throwing your full weight at the rowlock.

8. Try to push your button through the rowlock at the finish, throwing your full weight at the rowlock.

9. Poise, spring, draw, and sit back.

10. The race is merely an illustration of the amount of thought and care one has given to practise.

11. The instability of a boat is the only obstacle to every man’s doing his best; so hold the boat steady by keeping a firm and even weight on the handle of the oar.

12. The knees should open and the body come down between them.

13. The handle of the oar should be rowed home until it all but touches the body.

14. All races are won on the forward swing.

15. The young oarsman has hardly the faintest conception of the importance of understanding the subject.

16. (*St. Verissimus, Protector against Liars*.) A coach should be absolutely reliable in his promises as to when the crew will be given an easy.

17. When a man shows improvement, tell him he is improving.

18. The handle of the oar can be driven much farther back by allowing the body to act naturally than by holding it stiffly straight.

19. The cox's call as the boat approaches a corner, and just before he puts the rudder on, is the most important thing of all.

20. Don't wet the loom of the oar.

21. The more delicate the touch, the more finished the oarsman.

22. Finish the stroke out, sit back, and feel the feet on the stretcher.

23. The crew that uses its weight farthest per stroke must win.

24. Teach crews to work their oars. Never teach them to do anything with their bodies.

25. Once the button is drawn away from the rowlock one's control over the boat is gone.

26. If oarsmen give way to patting the water in order to steady the boat they will never get a true balance.

27. The blade should strike the water with the body flying towards the winning post.

28. Look at your blade now and then.

29. Keeping time is done by feel and not by sight.

30. Don't let your rigger rise.

31. The oar is a balancing-pole as well as a propeller.

NOVEMBER

1. It is the weight applied by the inside hand that strikes the blade down, flicks it into the air, and brings the oar on to the balance.

2. Calm your anxieties during the forward swing.

3. Always be alert and ready to start rowing.

4. In coaching, keep on hammering at the main points, but do not make the hammer lifeless by turning a phrase into a parrot-cry.

5. The saying that “the more you hoop your back the harder you will shove” is even truer than I thought.

6. (*St. Leonard, Patron of Chainmakers*.) Just as a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, so an oarsman can only row as long as his joints let him, and so a crew can only function usefully as long as the shortest man.

7. Keep the lateral pressure true, so that the button is always pressing against the rigger.

8. To get crews to talk over the theory of rowing at afternoon tea and at other times is most educational for them.

9. The hands must grip the oar with the fingers, where the touch and power are.

10. Make the blade ring the bell note.

11. (*St. Martin, Patron of Bankers*.) Many oarsmen are beaten by inability to strike on to the balance correctly, owing to minor troubles.

12. As a rule, the crew that launches its boat best is the winner.

13. When turning a boat, it is far better for the whole crew to act.

14. Finish up every day with twenty strokes of hard rowing into the boathouse.

15. Half an hour’s practise in turning the boat will improve a crew’s watermanship tremendously.

16. Telling individuals their faults destroy their confidence and kill their chance of welding together as a crew.

17. Don’t tell a man he is improving if he isn’t.

18. As an old oar and coach said to me recently: “If you keep the back straight, you can’t row the oar far past the perpendicular.”

19. Loose and easy, lazy and long.

20. Rowing the stroke out is the quickest way into the next stroke.

21. The longer the members of the crew row together the better they become.

22. (*St. Cecilia, Patroness of Musicians*.) Get the bell note at the moment of impact of the blade with the water.

23. (*St. Clement, Patron of Hatters*.) Let the crew go mad for the last six strokes before an easy.

24. To improve the oarsman you must improve the man.

25. (*St. Catherine, Protectress of the Tongue*.) When in doubt as to what to say to a man, or whether anything need be said, say nothing.

26. If the coach lets the men know that he is keen and watching, he need not say much.

27. Don’t think about getting the hands away; think about getting the body away from the hands.

28. Though the straight back looks neater to the eye, yet it is in the first place a trying position, and it does not move the oar or the weight of the body nearly so far as the natural action.

29. Let men alone as much as possible, because the more leisure they have for picking up the sense and timing of the crew, the more the stroke will develop into an eight-man drive.

30. The cox’s calls should be well timed and rhythmical.

DECEMBER

1. (*St. Eligius, Patron of Hangmen*.) Any conscious effort to lengthen the swing will defeat its object.

2. I never could understand barring [talking] “shop”. If you do a thing, you should do it because you like it; and if you like it, why not talk about it?

3. Coach a man to coach himself.

4. (*St. Barbara, Patroness of Undertakers*.) Showiness is not always evidence of usefulness. If one sees eight men carrying a coffin, four of them with backs bent under the load, and the other four turning their toes out like dancing-masters, one knows who is carrying the coffin.

5. The idea to get thoroughly into the oarsman’s mind is the necessity for taking pains and rowing every stroke as well as possible.

6. (*St. Nicholas, Patron of Oarsmen*.) The best coach for any crew is the bows of a faster boat coming behind them.

7. Keeping the elbows close to the side is antagonistic to the natural play of the body at the finish.

8. Backwatering must follow from dropping the hands before feathering and trying to lift the blade out square.

9. Row the blade straight home in one plane.

10. Take plenty of time over the finish, and be sure that it is rowed right out.

11. The body has to be held taut in order to supply the lateral pressure, as also to have control over the movements of the limbs generally.

12. When starting the boat it is best to start as if racing.

13. I have always been a believer in long work, especially early in training.

14. Good handling of a boat shows good oarsmanship.

15. The stale period that some crews experience arises from starting the fast work when too fat, owing to their having been kept under a glass case too much in the earlier stages.

16. So many would-be oarsmen sit without feeling for the balance, not recognising the importance of it.

17. “Every day and in every way,” try to grip the water a little farther behind the rigger and to drive the blade a little farther through the water.

18. Eliminate all effort and trust to unconscious action.

19. A man can do far more to steady the boat for the other side than for himself.

20. Every good outing is a joy, and every good stroke rowed is a pleasure in itself.

21. (*Shortest Day*.) Much can be done indoors with the help of extemporised rowing machines.

22. It is advisable to change oarsmen from one side of the boat to the other on alternate days.

23. The proficiency of the swing is exactly in the inverse ratio to that in which it catches the eye.

24. A crew will learn to row by racing, but it cannot learn to race by rowing.

25. (*Christmas Day*.) Dieting restrictions should not be too irksome. Let them eat and drink what they want, within reason.

26. Poise is the foundation of timing.

27. A coach should be keen for the boat to go, stimulate the crew now and then, but say very little.

28. By getting a beginner to look at his blade he can very soon make it work correctly.

29. (*St. Thomas of Canterbury, Protector against Blindness*.) It is no use rowing yourself blind. You are only baggage in that state.

30. A bad cox can do more harm than anyone else in the boat.

31. (*New Year’s Eve*.) Sit back at the finish till the cows come home.

THE AUTHOR

standing beside the River Cam
across from Jesus College Boat Club

SOME SECRETS OF SUCCESSFUL ROWING

Including "A system of training for a boat club and an exposure of the errors of 'orthodoxy'"

BY

STEVE FAIRBAIRN

(1930)

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INTRODUCTION

The object of this book is to get more oarsmen to think for themselves. That is a very difficult thing to do. Nevertheless, there are strong signs that all English athletes are beginning to think for themselves, instead of taking as gospel truth everything that has been handed down to them. Oarsmen should examine this and every other statement I make.

No doubt it shows fine loyalty to believe all that one is told by an older generation, but it is only a method of taking in fixed ideas. It comes of being too well looked after by the nurse, and by the games master at school. The nurse and the games master should teach the individual to look into the principles which they state. They should teach their pupil to use his initiative, to examine their statements, and to settle for himself what is right. It is good to notice that the nurse and the games master are, nowadays, acting more and more on these lines.

All athletic teaching, in golf, gymnastics, rowing, and other sports, used to be dominated by body-form. My teaching is, Let the body work unconsciously. I concentrate the oarsman's attention on moving the boat by working the oar. The general teaching in all games is working round to this idea.

Besides Jesus boats going Head of the Lent and May Races after I started coaching, in 1906, the second boats in both the May and Lent Races made a bump every night for four years. One man made bumps on 27 consecutive nights of these races. These second boats bumped the first boats of every other college except First Trinity's. For a small college to do that — there were only 69 [On page 275 of "The Jesus College Boat Club, Cambridge" by Freddie Brittain and Humphrey B. Playford it is stated that the figures were 124 for Jesus, 671 for Trinity if 1905. – I.F.] Jesus Undergraduates when I began coaching them — was surely proof that the coaching was truer than the "orthodox" coaching. But the orthodox powers merely denounced it, and English oarsmen stuck loyally to orthodoxy. But now the rowing world is rowing much more on the lines I advocate, though coaching is still greatly through the body.

Many coaches tell me they work entirely on "Rowing Notes", which I wrote in 1925. With the object of continuing that course of instruction, I am giving, in this book, my methods of coaching, and how I work and train a club for the year. Further, I criticise the exaggerations and wrong movements that are coached for by the "orthodox" body-form coaches.

Besides the fact that many clubs and schools are working on "Rowing Notes", girls have taken much more to rowing, and many girls' clubs have informed me that they are rowing on the principles laid down in my book. Japan, as well as Australia and America, have had many copies of "Rowing Notes", and German oarsmen are translating portions and distributing them to their clubs.

To these organisations, also, I hope this further volume will prove useful.

There is a good deal in this book about what crews I have coached have done, and, it may be thought, too much. But adverse criticism of my methods has been very strong, and there are many of the “orthodox” body-form people ready to spring back to the old body-form teaching, although that doctrine has been practically eliminated from the rowing world. For that reason, I have given a fairly full story of the success of my methods.

To what is said elsewhere concerning the results obtained by the adoption of my methods, I wish to add the testimony of a few leading rowing men. The following extracts are taken from letters written to me immediately after the Henley Regatta of 1930.

In considering them, it should be recalled that London won the Grand, the Stewards’, and the Wyfolds; Vesta won the Thames Cup and Lady Margaret the Ladies’ Plate; further, London won the Eights and Fours at the Empire Games in Canada.

FROM MR. W.W. MARCH, OF THE VESTA ROWING CLUB

“I can assure you that our Henley success was solely due to adopting your ‘Rowing Notes’ as a definite standard of style; and as last year’s Captain I had to ‘scrap’ all coaching that did not fall in with your theories. At the time I was not popular, but being able to give Len Field absolute control of the coaching, and he being an ardent admirer of your methods, the end has justified any little heartaches which may have been caused. . . .

“Your 'Rowing Notes’, your lecture at the boathouse, and the several times you have advised us from the launch — all have combined to bring the Thames Cup to our Club.”

FROM MR. O’BRIEN, CAPTAIN OF THE LONDON ROWING CLUB

[Terence Noel O’Brien, 1906-1986, among other accomplishments, winner with Archie Nisbet the 1927 Silver Goblets and the 1928 Olympic Coxless-Pairs Silver Medal. – P.M.]

“Basing our rowing on your teachings and maxims I think that we have at last got a very true rowing note throughout the club. The best proof of this is not so much that we won the Grand, Stewards’, and Wyfolds, but that our fourth VIII, which did well in the Head of the River race, won its juniors at Marlow in a canter, its junior seniors at Kingston, and is going to compete in the Senior (Thames Cup) VIII at Molesey, where I feel confident that it will give a good account of itself against opponents of many more years’ experience.

“This is, of course, a very fine effort for a crew of boys of nineteen and twenty; and it could not have been achieved but for the fact that in 1926-7 you instilled into the club, and into me in particular, right ideas on rowing and coaching on the tank in the winter. . . .

“Charles, I know, would be the first to admit that this is so, for he is shrewd enough to realise the great force you have been in the rowing world in recent years, a fact which others, somewhat unexpectedly, are also realising. I refer in particular to a column in *The Times* on Henley, which alludes to our Grand crew, and admits that crews coached on 'Mr. Fairbairn’s methods’ can become first-class.

“Lastly, I want to tell you that what I thank you for most is not so much that I have won the Grand or the Goblets or any other Henley trophy, but that since your arrival at the L.R.C. I have learnt to enjoy every race I row, win or lose. In 1924 I was kicked out of the New College VIII on the ground that I was not keen on rowing. Perhaps they were right; the dull slog of those days did not appeal to me much. I haven’t got the physical strength to endure it, and the thud of the oar against the front thole of a fixed rowlock has no charms for me. But the easy float forward, the quick loose spring, the throw away at the finish, and the swish of the boat in the water as it bubbles under you is a sure delight which has been achieved in this club only since you coached us. . . . ”

FROM MR. LEN FIELD,
OF THE VESTA ROWING CLUB

“It was very good of you to write congratulating us upon the results achieved by our 1st VIII this year, and to express approval of the coaching and methods used. You will realise, I think, that they are *your* methods, so far as we have been able to learn and apply them.

“When first I read your ‘Rowing Notes’ two or three years ago, it seemed quite clear to me that ‘Fairbairnism’ was only a different method of teaching; not an attempt to reach a different result. About that time you came afloat with our crews on two or three occasions, and you simply ‘opened our eyes’ to the practical application of your ideas. There is no doubt in my mind that the help you gave us was a very material factor in such successes as we have since attained.”

FROM MR. CHARLES REW,
OF LONDON ROWING CLUB

[Before becoming the L.R.C. coach, Rew had rowed for Steve at Thames Rowing Club as a teammate of the young Jack Beresford and Ian Fairbairn, winning the Grand Challenge Cup in 1923 and placing 4th in the Olympic Eights in 1924. – P.M.]

“I’ve been wanting to write to you for some time to pass on to you the many congratulations I have received on the L.R.C.’s success at Henley and, I suppose, now at Montreal. [1930 British Empire Games in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. London Rowing Club won the Men’s Eights by ¾ of a length over New Zealand. – P.M.]

“I think you know without my telling you how fully I appreciate what I owe you for your teaching of the gospel of rowing, and I trust I may prove a worthy disciple.”

FROM MR. O.V. BEVAN,
OF LADY MARGARET BOAT CLUB

[Owen V. Bevan, captain of Lady Margaret, one of four brothers, three of whom rowed. L.V. Bevan, also Lady Margaret, won the Boat Race in 1926 and 1927. Edward Vaughn Bevan won the 1928 Olympic Coxless-Fours title rowing for First Trinity Boat Club. – P.M.]

“We certainly did learn something from our outings with the Jesus crew. They gave us a practical example of good leg-work, smoothness and ease, which is part of what Sir Henry Howard has always tried to instil into us. He has, as you know, always aimed at so-called orthodox ideas, and the Jesus crew helped us on the way to some of them. If I may say so, both Jesus crew and the London Grand crew came nearer our ideals of style this year than the Jesus crews, for example, stroked by Mackinnon, when, in striving for a hard leg-drive, it seemed as if all other considerations were left aside. From such crews we learnt what to avoid as well as what to aim for. . . .

“Members of our club learn a lot from your books, and anything you write is (to us) usually profitable and always provocative — you would be the last to have us ‘swallow everything as if it were gospel truth’.”

Lady Margaret, it will be seen, try to uphold “orthodoxy”, but they worked with the Jesus Eight that broke the record on the Cam in 1930, and, with their fixed tholes, their style was identical with the style of the Jesus crews of the 80’s.

A metal outrigger and thole pin on a vintage boat.

This hankering after “orthodoxy” is due to loyalty; but the hankerers, and there are many, do not realise how far even the most “orthodox” crew of to-day has moved towards natural action.

The only crew at Henley (1930) that might not admit that it was working on my book was the Oxford four. [Brasenose College – I.F.] They won The Visitors’, but as the Jesus second four pushed them to half a length, after the Jesus four had rowed a gruelling eight-oared race three hours before, and three of the Oxford men were fresh, it looks as if the Jesus four, had they been fresh, would have won. Had they won, all the eight and four-oared races would have been won by crews working on my methods. Then we should have been back to where Henley was at the end of my rowing career in 1887, when all the winners were staunch for blade-work, and had been through my hands.

CHAPTER 1

A good beginning

That crews I have coached have been very successful is due to the fact that I coach the oarsman to work his oar, and I do not coach to work the body. Teaching body-form, as "orthodox" coaches do, is only trying to make the oarsman move his body as a finished oarsman does at his best. That the beginner cannot do; it means overreach and other evils.

There are taught a great many showy body movements that seem to the ordinary observer to be good, boat-moving movements, but are really tiring and incorrect. An example is, "Catch it with the shoulders." Here the legs are left out of account, and the lower part of the body moves slower; thus the shoulders appear to move faster. Whereas, "Drive the blade through the water" teaches the oarsman to apply the weight of all the body correctly, without being conscious of working the body. I give, in a later chapter, the incorrect movements of the body taught by "orthodox" body-coaching, and I go fully into the business of working the oar.

I want the beginner to realise the different points I stress. First, lateral pressure. Next, balance the blade on the sill, and hold it balanced evenly on the rowlock, all the way forward. Now, strike the water with a true bell note, next make the blade cut evenly through the water, and, with a hard finish, row the blade out, making the water swirl up behind the blade as if it were boiling. If the oarsman works to master these points, it does not matter how short he rows, he will row true; and the truer he rows, the longer he will row. Learning to row true is the best way, and the only way, to learn to row long. So the oarsman should practise these points, and, by continuous concentration on them, he will improve rapidly.

If the oarsman feels the strokes heavy, he is overreaching or mistiming. The remedy is to shorten up. He will not shorten really; he will row longer. It is the trying to row longer, trying many exaggerations, that destroys the length and the rhythm. All these points want a lot of practise and attention, but, most of all, the balance on the sill coming forward. This is far the most important.

Work continuously to feel the blade in your hands, to feel it balanced on the sill, get the balance right, and the rest will come easily. Feather high and bold is the best of all, but work always to make the oar work true and never for anything else. All else is wrong and defeats the oarsman's object. So keep your button up, feather high, lean on the oar, square the blade and poise, ring the bell note, make the blade cut evenly through the water, and make the water come up boiling. Never try anything else.

A leather sleeve and “button” on the loom of a vintage oar.

The coach and cox can help very much by their calls. They should study their calls and make them rhythmically. Some coxes call like the old cry, “Three, you are late,” in a monotonous voice. The coach and cox must be, in imagination, rowing the boat as they call. Take the call, “Sit back.” The word “sit” should be given as a warning just before the oarsman takes the water, and the call should be sharp and firm, as if he grips the water at the catch. Then there should be a pause, and “BACK” should come just before the finish, in a loud determined voice. If the call is given in this way it helps the oarsman to check the human tendency to start coming forward too soon, and so row the finish out hard, and throw the boat away, and row the hands away from the body, which then sustains the drive till the oar is rowed out. The cox’s call, “Easy all,” should be a long-drawn “Eeess” through the stroke, and “syall” sharp, to give the throw away, and the flick on to the balance. Oarsmen should row the stroke out, and finish smartly in this way.

I have a call, “Easy and Lazy.” This I call with a sharp firm grip of the “Ee” as the oar bites the water, and a long soothing “syand” as the oarsman draws the oar through, and a pronounced “La” as the oarsman whips the oar round the finishing turn and the blade is struck on to the feather; then “aaazy” delivered lazily and smoothly as the oarsman floats forward with the oar balanced on the sill of the rowlock.

Similarly: “Feather high!” “Feather” firm, and “high” sharp, striking the blade into the air. “Float out” — soothingly. “Let her run,” called with the idea of eliminating any rush. “Lean on your oar,” a long “Lean” getting the blade high in the air, and so on.

These calls should be key notes to set the timing, etc., and they should not be used too frequently, but always full of the fire and life of a racing spirit.

CHAPTER 2

Showy Errors

Off and on, I have coached oarsmen for over fifty years. At Cambridge I rowed in the Jesus College boat, for four years Head of the River; and I coached the crew from the boat from my Freshman's year onwards. I began by rowing the crew to Ely on the Monday of each week, and back on the Saturday.

When I was a boy at school we used to go for very long rows each Saturday, and it struck me at once that a long day's row worked wonders in a beginner. During all my career I have learnt more and more the value of these long rows.

In my last year at school I coached the school boat from stroke, and we won the Public Schools of Victoria Boatrace. This is a big event.

In my first year at Cambridge, all the old Jesus oars but one, Hutchinson, had gone down, and the Jesus boat started the May Term with Hutchinson and seven Freshmen. Six of them had never rowed before. Late in practise two old oars got in, and, with myself and four other Freshmen, we rowed Head — a performance that the Jesus dons told the Undergraduates, when I offered to coach Jesus twenty-five years afterwards, was due to my coaching.

In my fourth year, 1885, the Jesus boat won the Grand at Henley. That was with the May Boat crew, and it was the only occasion that a college has won the Grand with a crew all in residence. At other times when a college has won the Grand they have had some older oars in the crew.

This crew, also, was the lightest crew that has won the Grand [11 st. 3 lbs.]. Four of the crew were each under 10 st. 7 lbs. The bowside, except myself, averaged under 10 st. 7 lbs [actually 10 st. 9 lbs. at Henley. – P.M.]. Another feature of the performance was that we beat, in the final, a crew that beat a Cambridge Leander crew, with six of that year's 'Varsity crew and two old oars who were better than the two 'Varsity oars who did not row.

A few weeks before winning the Grand some of the crew were talking about winning the College Pairs. I was not quite satisfied with the way the boat was going, and I said, "What's the good of you fellows talking of winning the Pairs? You are all only ballast in the eight, and I am pulling you all along and the cox has the rudder against me."

That gave me an idea, and I added, "The cox [C.E. Tyndale-Biscoe, 8 st. 9 lb. – P.M.] and I will win the Pairs." To my astonishment we did win them.

Beating several potential Grand Challenge winners with the cox six stone lighter than I was, was a feather in my cap, but it was a marvellous performance for the cox. No doubt I had the watermanship to hold the boat steady and I gained a lot at Grassy

Corner [a turn to strokeside. – P.M.]. I rowed “cleverly” that is, I rowed with very little boat-turning up the straights, and a lot of boat-turning helping both sides round the corners.

Jimmy Hastie [James Hastie, 1848-1897, Thames Rowing Club, a particular hero of Fairbairn’s, winner of the Silver Goblets in 1877, 1880 and 1881, author of “Genesis of Rowing”. – P.M.] had told me that Hanlan [Edward “Ned” Hanlan, 1855-1908, World Champion single sculler 1880-84, considered to be the first individual in history to take full advantage of the sliding seat. – P.M.] used to scull straight across the Thames at Putney with only one scull, and he pointed out to me that by “clever” rowing an oar need turn the boat only very little, if at all.

I practised this, and so I could keep the boat going without turning her to any great extent up the straights. I had a very different action when bringing the boat round at Grassy — I was stroking on the bowside — and again a very different action when helping the boat round the other corners. At Ditton [Fen Ditton is a village just downstream of Cambridge. When returning upstream to the boathouses the River Cam gradually curves nearly 90° to bowside at Ditton Corner. – P.M.], with my oar on the inside, I always held my rigger very solidly, down, so that the outside oars could get a firm hold of the water, and at the finish I used to give a little backwatering push to thrust the stern out.

This “cleverness” should give oarsmen an idea of what a lot there is to think about in rowing. Concentration and a constant striving after improvement will reveal new heights to climb. It is just like climbing a mountain. One sees a peak in the distance and thinks that is the top, but on arriving there one sees another peak farther on, and so on. So in rowing, keep on concentrating and trying to do better; don’t rest on any peak, for if you do you will slide back and, perhaps, fall down a precipice.

At the moment of writing, I am coaching a crew with one man who was falling down the precipice but is all right now. Sometimes one sees ’Varsity oars give up trying to improve, thinking that because they are Blues they are at the top of the tree. They think they can stay where they are, but the result is deterioration and the loss of their seats in the ’Varsity Boats next year.

In 1923, Thames, coached by me, won the Grand with the next lightest crew [11 st. 9¼ lbs.] to the Jesus 1885 Grand winner [11 st. 3 lbs.] . In 1886 and 1887, with the exception of the winners of the Thames Cup, 1886, I had through my hands the winners of every race at Henley, *and all were rowing on the principles I taught*. In 1888 and 1889, Thames won the Grand, and the two captains wrote to me saying it was all owing to the work I had done from ’84-87 with Thames. I rowed four years for Cambridge, and five years in the Trial Eights, and once in the Inter-State race in Australia, making a record for long distance, eight-oared races of ’Varsity oarsmen.

I was always in favour of ’Varsity oars rowing in the Trial Eights. It has always seemed to me that all Blues should row in them, and I would — as I do with Club crews — pick a first and second Cambridge Eight, and work the crew to race Oxford against the next best eight, and make the Trial Eights a handicap.

Upward, the famous Victorian coach, [George Edward Upward, 1855-1915, founder of the Victorian style of coaching, named after the State in Australia. – P.M.] told me, years afterwards, that the Inter-State Eight I rowed in was the best that Victoria ever produced. I did the coaching and arranged the work of the crew from the boat.

I returned to coaching in 1905, and found the coaching had departed from my method of concentration on working the oar to the old “orthodox” method of positioning the body. There were the same old parrot-cries, many very showy, but quite wrong; also they had introduced a very showy movement, called “Lively Recovery”, which was meant to increase the length of the swing. To the casual spectator it looked longer, but it was not really so long as the true pendulum swing.

The movement consisted of jerking the body forward as fast as possible with the knees down, and getting all the swing over, and then sliding up. The true, even pendulum swing, with the slide moving with the swing, was longer and truer and easier; but it did not look so long.

The jerked movement strained the abdominal muscles of very many oarsmen; it strained the hearts of some; and was responsible for giving rowing a bad name.

After I had been coaching a few years, Jesus men were coaching twelve of the other Colleges, and this straining “Lively Recovery” movement disappeared. A masseur said to me: “I used to have to massage, and strap up, the muscles of sixty rowing men every term, and now that you have killed the 'Lively Recovery’ I have not one.” *How many strained hearts and ruined stomach muscles have I saved!*

This “Lively Recovery” made the men hate rowing and was fast killing it altogether. The Jesus Captain, the first year I went back to coach, was rowing in the ’Varsity Trial Eights, and he told me that the last night of practise the crew, as they put their oars away, said, “Thank God that is over for the term.”

The point I seek to bring out is that the tendency of young and keen coaches is to try to introduce something to get more pace on the boat. “Lively Recovery” is an example; and there are a great many showy errors they can, and some do, fall into.

Their idea is that if they get the bodies to seem to move faster the boat is being propelled harder, whereas any of these movements that catch the eye are false. If the shoulders seem to be coming back faster, it only means the lower part of the body is being left behind. If the whole of the body is being driven evenly back, the whole weight will be propelling the boat at its fastest and longest, and the whole weight will be moving so evenly, and with such harmony, that the movement will not be apparent.

It seems to me increasingly evident that coaching for body-form is wrong. The individual throughout life has always controlled his body, made up of many joints. Any one of the joints may be stiff, and so unable to move as the body-form coach would wish. To try to force the stiff-jointed oarsman into ideal body-form is a hopeless and useless task.

Further, by drawing the thought on to the body, it is taking the mind off the oarsman's real object, namely, working the blade. I have always kept crews concentrated on the blade. They have been wonderfully successful, and their bodies all come to one pattern. They do not present a pattern of flash show, but a pattern that anyone would show when lifting a load truly. I feel sure this pattern is true body-form, and the only way to get it is by working the oar, and letting the body work unconsciously.

This method is being taught more and more. The Putney Clubs, as a whole, are concentrating on blade-work. Cambridge Colleges are coming round, and many are coached by Jesus men now. Selwyn and Peterhouse, two small Colleges, got Jesus coaches four or five years ago, and they have for the last three years been first and second for the Michell Cup, given to the College that does best on the river during the year, and this year, 1930, Jesus have won it. To-day, the Jesus Captain writes to me that nearly every Cambridge College has been coached by Jesus men, last term or this.

Many schools are producing crews as I like to see them. The most noticeable was Monkton Coombe at Henley last year. Girls, as I mentioned earlier, are rowing on my "Rowing Notes", and the increase in the number of girls rowing is great, especially on the Tideway. The Kingston crew last summer I liked very much; and when I congratulated the coach he said: "It is all out of your book."

I advise coaches to work the oars and leave the bodies alone. Coaches have to be patient and realise Rome wasn't built in a day. It takes time for an oarsman to come to his best, and the quickest and only true way to reach that end is by concentrating on working the oar.

Coaches, as we have seen, are always bringing in exaggerations. The latest freak thing is the "Back Splash". A brilliant oarsman will at times flick his blade square too near the water, and splash some water on the bow canvas.

A brilliant crew will wet the bow canvas a lot, but this is only through the errors of genius. For the coach to train his crew to push the water on to the bow canvas, to cultivate "Back Splash", is a very different thing and a very wrong movement. But that is the latest fad.

As I have said, all my crews come to the same body-form, and this differs in many ways from the aims of orthodoxy that have been taught for the last fifty years. A later chapter is devoted to these movements, which I think are wrong, and to the reasons why I think so.

Besides the performances I have given, of crews I have coached, there are many others I might enumerate, all very successful. I will give a brief list *to show the value of blade-work*.

I coached my son at Eton, and about half-a-dozen boys who rowed with him. Four of these boys got into the Eton VIII, and the cox I coached steered, later, the Eton VIII.

Coaches don’t pay any attention to teaching coxes*. They would find great improvement in the crew if they helped their coxes more.*

The Jesus cox who steered me got his Blue, and after my return to coaching several Jesus coxes got their blues. Jesus crews went Head of the Lents and May Races soon after I began coaching again, and, since then, have been more often Head than all the other colleges combined.

Jesus is not one of the big colleges, and gets very few rowing men. In fact, since 1905, there have only been two Jesus men who had rowed in their school boat. In spite of this, Jesus have got more Blues than any other college, except Trinity College, which has more than three times the number of undergraduates that Jesus has. Taking the fifteen or sixteen colleges of similar size to Jesus, Jesus has got far more Blues during this time than the Blues from all these other colleges coached on orthodox principles.

The position of the Jesus second boats on the river provides even more convincing evidence of the value of blade-work. The Second Lent and May Boats went up more than a division apiece in the first few years of my coaching, and climbed as high as third and fifth in the Lents and Mays respectively, bumping the first boats of all the other colleges except First Trinity.

The next most important race to the Head of the River is the ’Varsity Fours. Third Trinity, being composed of Eton and Westminster Schools oars, have consequently efficient watermanship and so win these Fours very often. Leaving Trinity out, Jesus, while I have been coaching, have won these Fours more often than all the other college crews combined, and during this time Jesus has won the ’Varsity sculls four times — far more than an average proportion of wins. At Henley, they have won the Ladies’ three times, and were six or seven times in the final of the Grand, performances better than any other Cambridge college.

I coached Thames for several years after the War. They won the Grand for the first time for 33 years, and they won all, or nearly all, the senior races at the other regattas during those years. On two or three occasions their juniors won the Junior Eight with two crews in the same year, a feat that has never been accomplished before or since by any other club. And on two or three occasions the Thames second eight took the place of the first eight at the last regatta of the season and beat the first eights of the other clubs, also a feat never accomplished before or since by any other club.

In the May Races of 1930, at Cambridge, Jesus College not only went Head and stayed there easily, but they broke the record of the course in practise by six seconds. They were the best crew I have ever seen at Cambridge. I did most of the coaching, with Jerwood, Skinner [C.A. Skinner, Jesus College, 1910-12 Cambridge Blue Boat coxswain. – P.M.], and Reeve helping, and all working on the same lines. These notes have been in their possession for some time and, no doubt, helped considerably.

Pembroke, coached by one of my staunchest supporters, went second. They, like Jesus, used swivel rowlocks, and I hope the antiquated and awkward fixed thole will now disappear. Lady Margaret, who worked with Jesus in practise, went third.

Selwyn, a very small college, went fourth. They were the first to adopt my methods, and their success has been phenomenal ever since. Amongst other successes, they have got two rowing Blues, the first two from that college. They have also won the Michell Cup several times, a cup which is given for the most successful rowing college throughout the year.

Christ’s, rowing in true Jesus style, went sixth, while First Trinity and Third Trinity, the last of the “orthodox” college rowing clubs, were bumped to fourth and fifth from first and second. These performances prove more than ever the value of blade concentration.

CHAPTER 3

The Doom of Orthodoxy

Since my book, “Rowing Notes”, was published, the English rowing world has altered its style of rowing very much. Looking at the crews at Cambridge, at Putney, and at Henley, it is obvious that the body-form of “orthodoxy” is disappearing, and that crews are rowing on the lines prescribed in “Rowing Notes”.

Many coaches have told me they are working on my book entirely. Bob Sherriff, the author of “Journey’s End” [a play debuted in London in 1928 starring the young Lawrence Olivier. – P.M.], told me, at Marlow, that he was working Kingston entirely on it. Many of the schools at Henley showed that they, too, had adopted my methods. Monkton Coombe were exactly what I like to see, and so were many of the other schools.

Among the girls’ crews, a similar result is apparent. Newnham College have a Jesus coach, and, according to what their members tell me, they enjoy rowing much more and they row much longer distances than they used to. They raced the other four leading girls’ clubs in 1930, and beat them all.

Trinity College, Dublin, took to rowing on my book, and in their first year broke all their previous records. They, too, report that they enjoyed their rowing much more than formerly.

One of the leaders of a German rowing club wrote to me that, after reading my book, they felt that they had been rowing as if trying to walk up a hill in parade formation, instead of surmounting it by natural action. That is how I have often described the difference between the old “orthodoxy” and my system.

The famous old Jesus don, Tommy Watt, who took remarkable interest in all the athletic performances of Jesus undergraduates, has often told me that he has frequently asked Jesus oarsmen, who have been coached by the “orthodox” coaches for the ’Varsity Trials and for the ’Varsity Boat: “What is the difference between Fairbairn’s teaching and the others?” He always received the same reply: “Just the difference between Heaven and Hell!”

Jesus Blues and Trial Eight men have very frequently complained that it is such heavy work rowing in a ’Varsity Eight or Trial. But the “orthodox” coaching has been slowly swinging towards my methods, and I am glad to say the Jesus man in the last ’Varsity Boat tells me they are being coached on lines very much like the Jesus methods. But there is a good deal of the old “orthodoxy” being taught, and it is very hard for a coach to refrain from it.

It is hard for a coach to resist the temptation to make his crew’s bodies show as if they were going faster and doing more work, which is all illusory, and all wrong. My crews forget their bodies, and work their oars. Consequently, their bodies assume an unconscious, natural action, and all come to the same positions.

Not very long ago several coaches who coached for blade-work met me, and in the course of conversation one said, “Rowing is a religion,” to that we all agreed. In fact, to do anything truly and well is a religion, and I think deep down is the fact that to teach properly one must teach to do the pupil good, and not for his own glorification.

If we take rowing as a religion, my text for the sermon is II Corinthians, 5th chapter, 8th verse:

> We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

On this I would remark: When I came back to coach in 1905 a controversy started on rowing styles. One eminent correspondent began: “Who is this Mahdi who comes from the other end of the world and preaches to us that our rowing is wrong?” This controversy continued for over twenty years, and *The London Evening News* wound it up beautifully by concluding a very complimentary article by saying, “Steve Fairbairn is the Socrates of the towpath.”

So now listen to Socrates pointing out the errors of “orthodoxy”.

CHAPTER 4

Errors of Orthodoxy

In the first place I would say “orthodoxy” teaches a man to pose, and to move his body. This, I think, is entirely wrong. The teaching in rowing should be to work the oar to propel the boat (and in cricket and golf, to work the bat and the club respectively to strike the ball correctly) and to let the body move naturally and unconsciously.

The teaching in golf has, in the last few years, veered very much from positioning the body to working the club. Years ago, if a man took a lesson from a pro, he would be given a mass of instructions as to positioning his body. Now, if one watches a pro teaching, he is demonstrating all the time how to swing the club.

Talking with many a golf pro on the theory of teaching to work the club, I have frequently had the reply: “I quite agree, and many a time I have felt that what I am saying will do more harm than good, but one is paid for the lesson and one feels that one must say something.”

This applies very much to rowing coaches. They feel they must say something. Many times I have asked who is considered the best Jesus coach for the year. Usually the one named is the one that says the least. Such a man is, of course, the keenest, and he imparts that keenness to his pupils.

Several of the old “orthodox” principles have been dropped by many coaches. A Jesus captain of a few years back said to me recently that the rowing at Cambridge had swung very much from the old “orthodoxy” towards the Jesus style. (Jesus men have noticed this tendency for years now.) Later, the Jesus captain, rowing in the ’Varsity Eight, wrote to me: “The coaching is exactly the same as at Jesus, except for one point, the position at the finish.” They, of course, coach through the body, but they coach for all the natural positions that blade-work produces except one.

There are some old teachings in “orthodoxy” that are very showy, but very false, and these I am afraid may come back in force. I will point out where these teachings are wrong.

I doubt if people who consider themselves “orthodox” would find that they are all of the same mind. If, say, twenty of the most “orthodox” coaches were asked for a description of “orthodoxy”, I imagine there would be many differences in their definitions, and where there was a general agreement I think it would be on the points I hold to be “real orthodoxy”.

One old “orthodox” statement I have heard from many a ’Varsity coach is: “I do not believe in getting a crew together too soon because, if one does, they will go off later.” This has always seemed to me to be a most extraordinary statement. I suspect it of being really an apology for not having welded the crew together. I prefer to say, Weld your crew together as soon as possible, and a crew's improvement will be in direct ratio to its progress to getting together.

Rowing together is harmony, and harmony produces greater harmony. To me it always seemed amazing that coaches could say that it does not do to get a crew together too soon, and I never for a second believed that they really thought it.

Many other "orthodox" statements I have always regarded, similarly, as apologies. One of them is the assertion that a crew of strong men, rowing in a bad style, can, by brute strength, beat a crew rowing in better style. The strength of an oarsman is merely the degree of correctness there is in his style. The strength of a brute is not the clumsiness that this statement is intended to suggest; it is really a splendid exhibition of athletic power through perfect movement.

Watch the movements of the feline tribe. There is brute strength, and it is the exact opposite of what is meant by brute strength in the "orthodox" faith. The strength or power of an oarsman is the pace and length he can apply his weight to propel a boat, and frequently the crew of so-called strong men are really not physically so strong as the other crew. It is not that they are rowing in worse style, but the round-backed, bent-armed shover is rowing in better style than the flat-backed, rigid-armed body-jumping man.

Another erroneous statement is: "Eight-oared rowing is different from four-oared, and pair-oared rowing, and from sculling." This statement I have always thought was made because the four-oared and pair-oared oarsmen and scullers that won shot their slides, rounded their backs, and pulled with their arms, and did not conform to "orthodox" teaching. Certainly, oarsmen in winning fours and pairs, and winning scullers have none of the showy eight-oared movements taught by "orthodox" teachers.

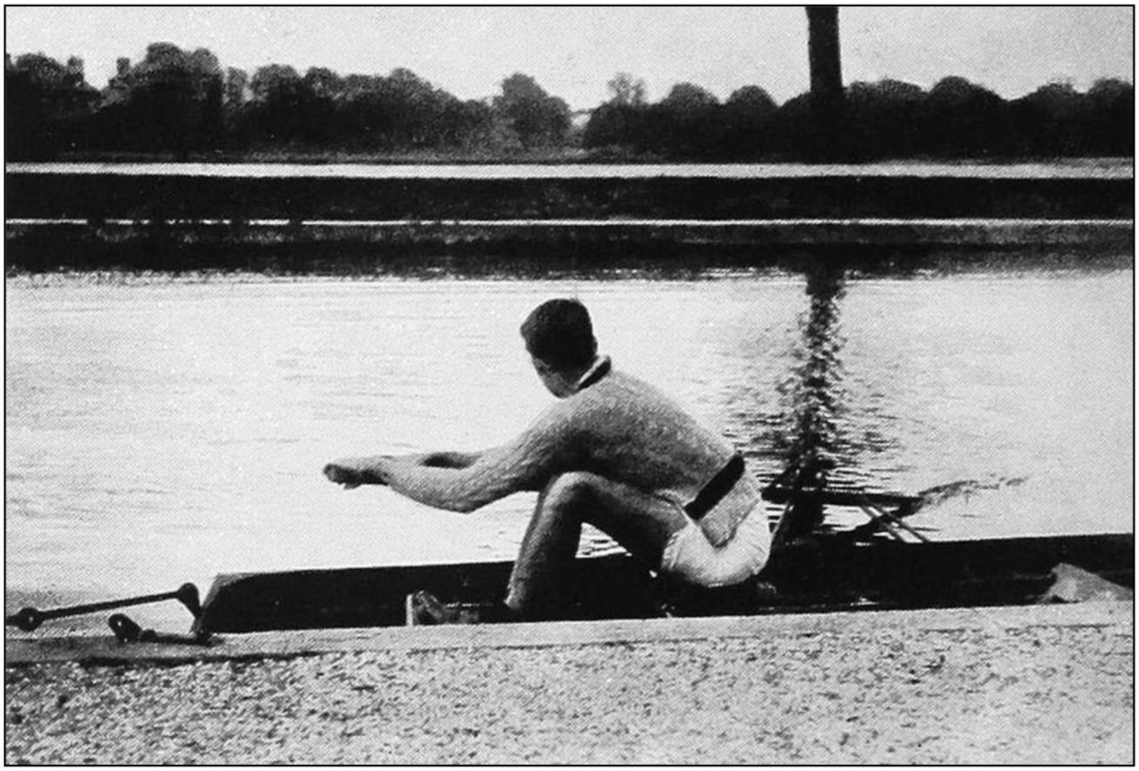
The "orthodox" teachings I object to are: (1) Keep the back straight. (2) Keep the arms straight as long as possible. (3) Catch it with the shoulders and then use the legs. (4) Row the body over. (5) Don't let the slide slip away. (6) Drop the oar in forward. (7) Row the hands in till they touch the chest, and then (8) drop the hands and (9) bring the oar out square, and (10) then turn on to the feather (11) the Lively Recovery (worst of all), and now, alas, (12) the Back Splash.

As I have said, I do not coach for body-form at all, but aim at concentrating entirely on working the blade to move the boat. But all my crews come to very much the same movements, which are natural and unconscious. I will go into these natural movements whilst criticising the "orthodox" and incorrect movements.

Keep the back straight. This is tiring and stiff, and shortens the reach both fore and aft. The natural position is to sit perfectly loose and easy, the body not slouching but taut. If the back is held flat it cannot get as far forward as if it is held naturally loose and easy, and the shoulders are allowed to stretch right forward. Similarly, if the back is held flat on the back swing, the oar cannot be rowed so far home as if the back is allowed to be driven out and rowed away from the oar with a whalebony movement at the finish. The back held flat means that the stomach is held much farther forward (to meet the oar) than when the back is driven out with a lissom, whalebony movement, thus allowing the oar to be rowed farther home. With the straight back, the shoulders finish much farther back *than the lower part of the body*, and so give the appearance of a longer swing and a faster movement of the shoulders, but only because the lower part of the body is not going so fast as when the natural action of the body is allowed to govern the movement; then the shoulders are carried as far back *and the belly and oar much farther*. The "orthodox" movement looks faster and longer because the lower part of the body is not moving as far as it does in the more harmonious movement of natural action.

Row the body over is the same thing. It means, make the shoulders go faster than the lower part of the body, and this is only done by *making the lower part of the body go slower*. Consequently, the expressions, "Catch it with the shoulders" and "Row the shoulders over" have a tendency to check leg work. In natural action — the result of true blade-work — the whole body is driven back as fast as possible, the shoulders go as far and the lower part of the body much farther than in the straight backed movement; but, all moving harmoniously, it does not catch the eye so much. The old cry of *catch it with the shoulders first* simply means hollowing the back, throwing out the chest, and throwing forward the lower part of the body. It is very spectacular, but it is very ineffective in boat propulsion, and very exhausting. The Jesus men told me in the 80's that the round-backed crew always beat the straight-backed crew, and there is the explanation. It means using the full weight to its greatest distance, in the easiest manner, instead of only a partial use of the weight, a shorter distance, in a tiring manner. Again, catch it with the shoulders first is impossible, for the body can only be moved back by the leg-drive. *There are no muscles in the back with which to move back the back.* Let anyone try. Sit on a chair and move the back backwards. The experimenter will notice he pushes the floor. Take the feet off the ground, and he will push with the underneath part of the leg against the chair. Let him sit right forward with the feet in the air, and he will find he can't move his back at all. Yet it has always seemed to me this cry of "Catch with the shoulders, bodies over," is an endeavour to get these imaginary back muscles to work harder.

Keep the arms straight as long as possible, and *don't pull with the arms because if you do they will tire*. Also, *If you pull with the arms you will pull the body up to the oar and so not use the body.* These are "orthodox" cries that I hear frequently. In my early days of coaching I used to say: "People say you must not use your arms, but the oar has got to be drawn evenly into the body, and I don't see how you are going to do it without using the arms." By forgetting the body and limbs, and concentrating on working the oar, this difficulty disappears. Many years ago I read a book on "Rowing and Sculling", by Bill East, England's professional champion sculler, and a beautiful stylist, in which he said: "Amateurs say you must not use your arms, but every professional does use them." Then I experimented, and asked the crew I was coaching to use their arms as hard as they could, and to see if they could tire them. They found that they could not tire their arms, and they drew the boat along very much faster and better by trying to use them. Many times since then I have asked crews to draw at the handle of the oar as hard as possible, and try to tire their arms. No one has ever tired them yet. On examining, I have found what happens is, if one pulls at the oar the muscles down the sides of the back are brought into play.



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Note the elastically bending arm drawing the springing body on to the oar.

Therefore, pull at the oar as hard as you can, and you won't tire your arms, but the harder you draw, the more these back muscles will be brought into play and developed, and the better the weight will be applied. Pulling with the hands at the oar pulls the weight of the body on to the oar, and so uses its weight. The old idea was that if you pulled with your arms you would thus stop using the weight of the body. Let anyone try to lift his weight off the seat when rowing and he will see what pulling with the arms does. In Edwards's boat-house in Melbourne there were photographs of several professional scullers, all taken, as they raced, stripped to the waist. They all had these muscles wonderfully developed. Unfortunately, the pictures were lost, or I would have reproduced them. Those scullers were marvels of proficiency.

Hold the slide. Another orthodox cry. This tends to hold the body out of action, for powerful leg work will start the slide flying back, thus stretching the body out, and so applying the full flying weight; but if one is told he is letting his slide slip, and he tries to check it, the result is only a loss of leg work. Let one lift a weight from the ground up to full arm length. He will notice that the part of the body he sits on shoots first. It thus starts a momentum to propel the weight, and it stretches the body out, so that the push of the feet on the ground, and the pull of the hand on the weight, apply the fully stretched body to move the weight. The argument against letting the slide run is that there is a loss of the full length. The answer is that in all machinery there is a loss at every turn, and an oarsman is only a human machine.

Let anyone watch a man lifting a weight, and he will see there is a slide shoot. Let him watch an oarsman, in a fixed rowing apparatus on the land, trying to propel a weight from the end of an oar, and he will see a terrific slide shoot. He will see that everyone shoots his slide very fast to generate momentum, and the faster the slide shoots the farther the weight is propelled, and the easier. He will notice that the first time anyone tries this, the subjective mind unconsciously takes possession of the slide, and shoots it correctly to get the greatest power. Next watch a person sitting forward in this machine, take a 56-lb. weight in his hands, and from right forward throw it as far as he can over his head. One will see a slide shoot much faster and much farther than when lifting a weight or propelling a weight with an oar.

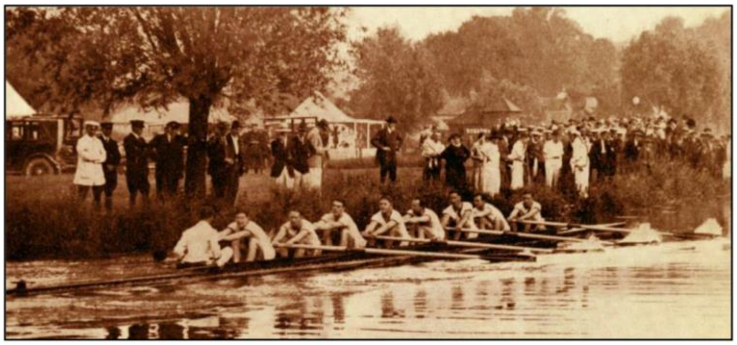
Let anyone watch these movements made by a lot of Freshmen, without any instruction, and he will see that one and all go through the same movement, showing that the subjective mind unconsciously regulates the movements of the body. The principle is very apparent. It is that everyone will move his body correctly if he moves entirely unconsciously; thus, if coaches, one and all, teach oarsmen to work the oar, and let the body work unconsciously, it will work correctly, *and that is the only way to get it to work correctly*. Of course, the beginner will not couple the slide shoot so well as the finished oar, and will at first appear to lose power; but as he continues, it will come true, whereas by stopping the shoot the leg-drive will never come.

Drop the oar in forward and *Drop the hands at the finish to bring the oar out square*, are two more “orthodox” errors of teaching.

The word “drop” is, I think, very bad. It gives the idea of letting the oar fall involuntarily, whereas the oar should be always controlled. The idea, of course, is to put the oar in at the full reach, and so utilise one hundred per cent. of the movement. This is contrary to the fact that in machinery there is a loss at every turn, and at this turn there must be a loss; for if there were not, the oar being put into the water at full reach would have no forward movement, and so would backwater, and then after the oar was backwatered in, the oarsman would start propelling, which would be a dull, blood-vessel-bursting lug.

The oar must be rowed in, and as it hits the water it must be moving faster than the boat is running past the water, to generate any power. With a lightning spring, and a racing slide, and a flying body, one rows the oar in and applies full moving weight. This drives the oar through truly, and one has no heavy, lugging feeling at all. Thus one can apply one’s full weight every stroke, without tiring the muscles in the least. Everyone must lose some of the full reach, but the cleverer the oarsman the nearer to the dead centre will he catch the water.

The Back Splash. Brilliant oarsmen, striking the water near the dead centre, are apt occasionally to squirt some water on to the bow canvas. As a result, a saying arose, “A wet bow canvas means a fast crew." But squirting the water forward is an error, and with brilliant oarsmen is the eccentricity of genius. It is the genius with the flying blade occasionally turning the blade square too near the water and flicking it on to the bow canvas. This is imitating the eccentricities of genius with a vengeance; and is merely teaching backwatering and filling the boat with water. A more erroneous teaching could hardly be invented.



1925 Jesus College May Boat, Head of the River
Back Splashing
(After 1918, Steve split his time between Jesus and Thames RC.)

This is what is always happening, trying to teach some exaggerated movement, hoping to get more pace. Of course, it is due to the constant search for some dodge to shift the boat, but it shows a hopeless want of understanding to teach a man to throw water into the boat, when he should be gathering to strike.

To teach dropping the oar in at the full reach is bad enough. But no oarsman races like this, because, however much it is taught, the subjective mind takes possession as the race gets near, and, in spite of the most hardened "drop the blade in" coaching, every oarsman rows the blade in, and thereby loses (as all machinery must) something of the full length at the turn.

Let anyone get a slow-motion picture of any crew racing, and he will see every oar is rowed in and out. Similarly, the doctrine of "Drop the hands, and row the blade out square," is counteracted by the subjective mind, and the blades are all started to turn just before the finish. One has only to look at any crew's blades at the finish to see this. If the hands were dropped and the blade rowed out square, it would backwater out — a very serious fault, especially with a swivel; as the tendency, before the stroke is finished, is to start the oar forward, and this, with a swivel and squared blade, would mean heavy backwatering. In recent years we have seen two Cambridge strokes catching crabs in practise owing to this teaching.

Row the hands in till they touch the chest, is another fatal "orthodox" error. But it is practised by many people, and they get a false sense of that most difficult of all the movements with the oar, bringing the oar round this turn with an endless-chain movement. The hands, or oar, should never touch the body. One sees many an oarsman with bloody hand, zephyr, or sweater, from rubbing the hands against the body, and holes worn in zephyr or sweater. To inflict this injury means backwatering; it also breaks the rhythm.

Now we come to the *Lively Recovery*, universally taught early in this century. It meant getting all the swing done, with the knees down, and then sliding up; instead of having an even swing that was continuous throughout the whole forward movement. To get this "Lively Recovery" (which was very jerky and so looked fast and long) meant cutting the finish, and putting in a hideous effort, whereas a true, pendulum swing feels as if one were taking a perfect rest. This effort was very tiring, and the belly muscles and hearts of many oarsmen were strained. It was brought in by a coach who was otherwise very good and the "orthodox" world followed it.

The Jesus men I coached used to notice that, as Henley drew near, the crews all conformed more and more to my teaching. That is, the Lively Recovery became less, and the swing truer. The explanation is that, as the races drew near, the subjective mind brought in a truer action and the oarsmen concentrated more on moving the boat. In 1912, when the Australians won the Grand, they asked me: "Why does Leander shorten to row?" Here was the same explanation. They thought more of moving the boat. The Lively Recovery disappeared and natural action came in as the race came nearer. They did not, in fact, get shorter; they got longer, but being smoother the movement did not catch the eye so much.

Coaches become over-anxious and so introduce wrong and exaggerated ideas, such as the Back Splash. They try to do too much; they depart from natural movement, and so we hear some astonishing things.

I wonder if, in the future, we will hear again that long slides are piston-rodding, and that they ruin rowing, as all the Cambridge rowing authorities told me when I introduced them in 1885? Yet that crew of 1885 won the Grand at Henley, beating a crew that beat a Cambridge Leander eight with six of that year's Blues in it, and that Jesus crew was the lightest crew that ever won the Grand.

Shall we see crews Back Splashing till they fill the boat and it sinks?

Shall we hear that the true action I taught the Thames '23 crew that won the Grand was also piston-rodding, and their victory would throw English rowing back ten years? Yet that crew was 21 lbs. a man lighter than the others.

Shall we hear that a Jesus crew that won the Ladies' in '28, beating many schools and colleges, was on the backstop of the slides, and the blades abaft of the tholes before they entered the water? There is a great danger of this, and my object is to prevent it. The English mind, however, is very apt to go back to the old parrot-cry of tradition. I sincerely hope it won't, but the English mind is very stubborn and hard to move.

During my career, I have made several alterations in rowing, and I doubt if any other alterations have been made. The first thing I did was when I was Secretary of the C.U.B.C. in my second year. I got out the Trial Eight cap; then the long slide; then the fifth arm on the rigger; next, centre seating the eights; then the fixed tub; then swivel rowlocks; and now we have the fixed seats abolished; and I hope to see all men allowed to row in the Lent Term. It seems more than silly to keep the best oars on the bank practically from May till May.

My method is to work the oar. It can be summed up in very few words. First show a man how to keep the button always pressing against the rowlock, all through the stroke and the forward swing. Next, show him how to balance his oar evenly on the sill of the rowlock all through the forward swing. Now show him how to square the blade firmly when forward; next show him how to make a true bell note as the blade strikes the water. Continuing, show him how to make the blade cut evenly and continuously through the water, as fast and as far as possible; next show him how to throw the boat away at the finish, and make the water come up boiling. Now show him how to strike on to the balance on the sill, being careful to start turning the blade on to the feather just before the finish. Then let him work continuously to get a better bell note, a faster and longer cutting of the blade through the water, and to make the water come up boiling more behind the blade at the finish. Let him concentrate entirely on these points and forget the body. *Then and only then will the body move truly*.

There is no other way of getting a true body movement.

CHAPTER 5

Working on a System

I have always worked my college and club crews on a system. Because I have found there is a great lack of system in many colleges and clubs, I will explain how I work them. I know at Cambridge there is a marked absence of method in many colleges, because Jesus coaches, when coaching other colleges, have often remarked on the complete lack of system.

I like to begin by getting the rowing men together and having a regular, rowing talk. This starts the men thinking. The beginner is apt to cherish the idea that going out in a boat is all that is necessary; whereas the essential thing is the amount of thought one puts into rowing. An oarsman will improve in direct ratio to the extent of his thinking and the degree of his concentration.

Concentration is not too easy to acquire. One's attention is very apt to wander. It will help concentration if the oarsman realises that every stroke he rows *is felt by, and influences, all the rest of the crew*. Every stroke rowed carelessly destroys the confidence of the crew, and every stroke well rowed increases their confidence, and the crew rows better or worse accordingly.

For instance, the cox calls on 2 to row a stroke. He rows carelessly, slices his oar in, pulls his rigger down, and rolls the boat. The crew all feel this, and it unsettles them. They start the next stroke nervously.

If the oarsman can realise that it is of the utmost importance to do his best at every stroke, he will improve much more quickly.

Again, take that bad stroke. It makes the crew nervous; they start hurriedly and badly, and do even worse next time. Eventually, they lose the race by a few feet. If that stroke had been a good one the crew would certainly have been a good many feet faster.

I overheard an oarsman boasting of how every time the captain had asked the crew to keep the boat steady he deliberately rolled it. That crew lost the Grand by a few feet. I don't suppose the man ever realised that he had lost the Grand by his rolling the boat.

I have encountered two extreme instances of defective concentration. The first was provided by a Fresher of my year, who was turned out of the College Crock Eights. He was a finely built man, and I thought something must be wrong, so I tubbed him. At once, by his first remark to me, he showed he didn't concentrate, so I told him here was the reason why he was kicked out of the Crock Eights. He concentrated, and got into a Jesus Lent Boat, and went in a few days into the Jesus 1st Lent Boat. Next Term he went into the 1st May Boat, and the following Term into the 'Varsity Trial Eights. The Term after that he went into the 'Varsity Boat.

The other case was of an average athlete, who was very keen. He concentrated very well, and used to read every night, in bed, some rowing notes I gave him.

He got his Blue and became President of the C.U.B.C.

The latter case I have quoted as a very good instance of the value of reading notes on rowing. So read about rowing. Don't read and swallow slavishly, but examine, and try to find out if you can do it better. Even "Rowing Notes" may not be perfect.

Always I tell my crews that everyone has made the same movements as those made in rowing hundreds of times, and correctly. Every time anyone picks up anything from the ground, he will move hand, body, and bend the knees (just as sliding in a boat) all in perfect time, and if he is taught to concentrate on working the oar to propel the boat the body will make these correct movements unconsciously. I go further, and state that I am certain that the body will only work absolutely correctly when one is *thoroughly concentrated on working the oar and absolutely unconscious of the movements of the body*. Any conscious thought of the body acts in opposition, and destroys the harmony of the stroke.

Here are some instances of unconscious movements of the body.

After the War, I was coaching the Thames 1st crew, and I asked Tann [John Lawrence Tann, born 1890. His grandson is Tim Crooks, British Olympic sculler during the 1970s. – P.M.] to open his legs and let the body come between them. Tann was the holder of the Wingfield Sculls at the time [won in 1914]. He said he thought he had more power with his knees together, and he added: "Barry (World's champion sculler) [Ernest James Barry, 1882-1968, 3-time World Professional Sculling Champion between 1912 and 1920. – P.M.] sculls with his knees shut."

Barry was in the boathouse, and we went and asked him how his legs moved. He said *he did not know*, but photographs showed them together. I watched him sculling later, and though the knees were close together on the forward swing, still, as they reached the body they opened, and the body came between them. There was a champion concentrating on moving the boat, and letting the body work unconsciously.

I wanted to convince Tann, so I asked my old friend "Hutch" (a winner of over 200 races) how his knees went, and he said, "I'm blowed if I know." Again, unconscious action.

I once heard Beresford [the young Jack Beresford, 1899-1977, 3-time Olympic Gold Medallist, as opposed to his father, also an Olympic Medallist. – P.M.] and "Hutch" arguing which part of the foot pushed the stretcher to move the body. They had won 400 races between them, and they thought they used their feet differently.

Although one should be unconscious of body movements when rowing, still, it is useful to explain the movements.

At the finish, having rowed the oar round the turn and on to the feather, the hands keep moving the oar away and start forward first — that is, “let the oar lead.” Then the body starts swinging, and then the knees rise and the slide starts.

So the timing order is: Hands first, then body, then slide, although almost simultaneous.

This prevents the opposite movement of slide, body and then hands, which would be fatal to the stroke, as the oar would catch against the rising knees. The hands, body, and slide should come to the full reach forward at the same time, the body loose and easy, taut, but not rigid, knees letting the body between them, shoulders play in their sockets, and back allowed to round to get the full reach of natural, unconscious action. There should be no effort to stretch very long; it should be just natural and easy.

After explaining this, I go on with what is known as the Jesus or “Fairbairn” style.

It is concentrating on working the oar, and, as I have said, natural body-action. The first thing to learn about working the oar is to keep the button pressing firmly against the rowlock, all through the forward swing, and throughout the stroke. That I call *Lateral Pressure*. I go into this thoroughly when working in the fixed tub, but it should come in the original talk.

Then learn to *balance* the oar evenly on the sill of the rowlock, all through the forward swing, and so hold the boat controlled and steady. Next, learn to square the blade and poise forward, in order to gather to strike the water with a true bell note. Now make the blade cut evenly through the water, and then make the water come up boiling behind the blade at the finish. Then impress on the crew to “sit back” at the finish and “poise” when forward, and explain there are many movements to be executed at each turn — at the finish and forward. The natural thing is for the beginner to hurry these turns, and so destroy the time, and true timing is the basis of rowing, and all athletics.

To finish the talk, I repeat that few oarsmen realise the value of reading notes on rowing. If an oarsman had a copy of the foregoing and read it every evening for some time it would establish these ideas in his mind. One talk may do something, but it requires a lot of repetition for a beginner to grasp the subject, and the frequent reading of notes on rowing will be a great help.

In the foregoing I have repeated important points frequently, because I have found it essential to repeat in coaching.

CHAPTER 6

Work in the Fixed Tub

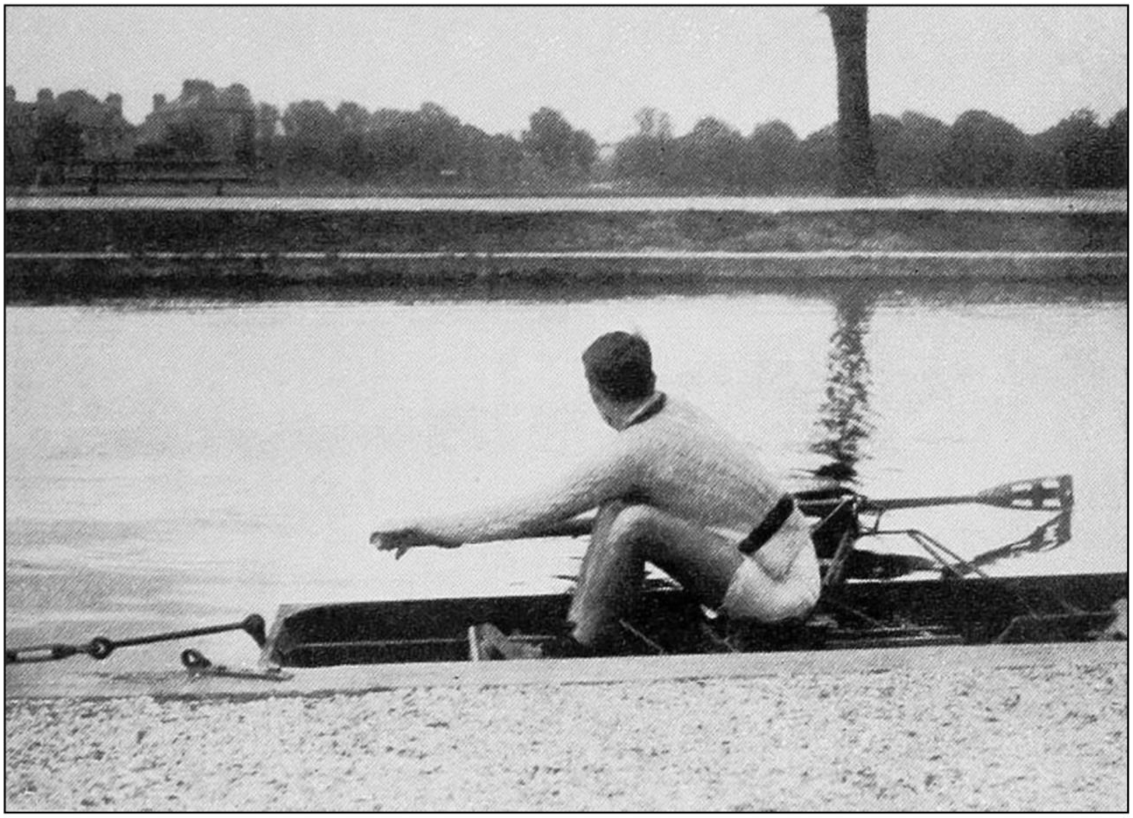
(I) LATERAL PRESSURE

After the preliminary talk on rowing the coach should start working in the Fixed Tub or Tank. The coach should begin by illustrating the *Lateral Pressure*. He should point out how the oar handle moves in the segment of a circle, and not in a straight line. I fancy a great many oarsmen never realise this. They think that the hands go straight forward and back; and so the button gets pulled away from the rowlock, and all sense of control and balance is destroyed.

The coach should start by rowing half a dozen strokes in the air, not using the water at all, pointing out the circular movement of the oar, and holding the button firmly up against the rowlock all the time. Rowing the blade in the air is teaching balance and control, besides being a lesson on Lateral Pressure. While rowing a few strokes, the coach should let each of the men on the bank, in turn, try to pull his oar away from the button at different parts of the stroke, having fastened a string on to the oar to pull. I have often done this, and at first I was astonished at the extraordinary power of Lateral Pressure that I have developed. The person trying to pull my oar away from the button could not shift it at all, and I rather think that I had a Lateral Pressure, or rather a latent power of holding the oar against the button which coincided with the full weight of my body. Concentration and time will bring that efficiency.

I was very much surprised at the ease with which I could resist efforts to pull my button away. Learning to exercise Lateral Pressure is similar to screwing a machine into its bed — that is the first thing to be done with any machine; and an oarsman is only a human machine.

The coach should show how, at the finish, one should try to drive the button through the rowlock, and the harder one tries to push it through, the lighter and more elastic will be the spring away of the hands, and oar. Similarly, he should illustrate trying to push the button through the rowlock when forward. The result will be the same elastic spring. As he springs and stretches the body, he should try to push the button off and feel he is hanging stretched in the air, hanging between the rowlock and the stretcher, pulling at and trying to climb the oar. This will give a glorious elastic spring and will firm up the Lateral Pressure.



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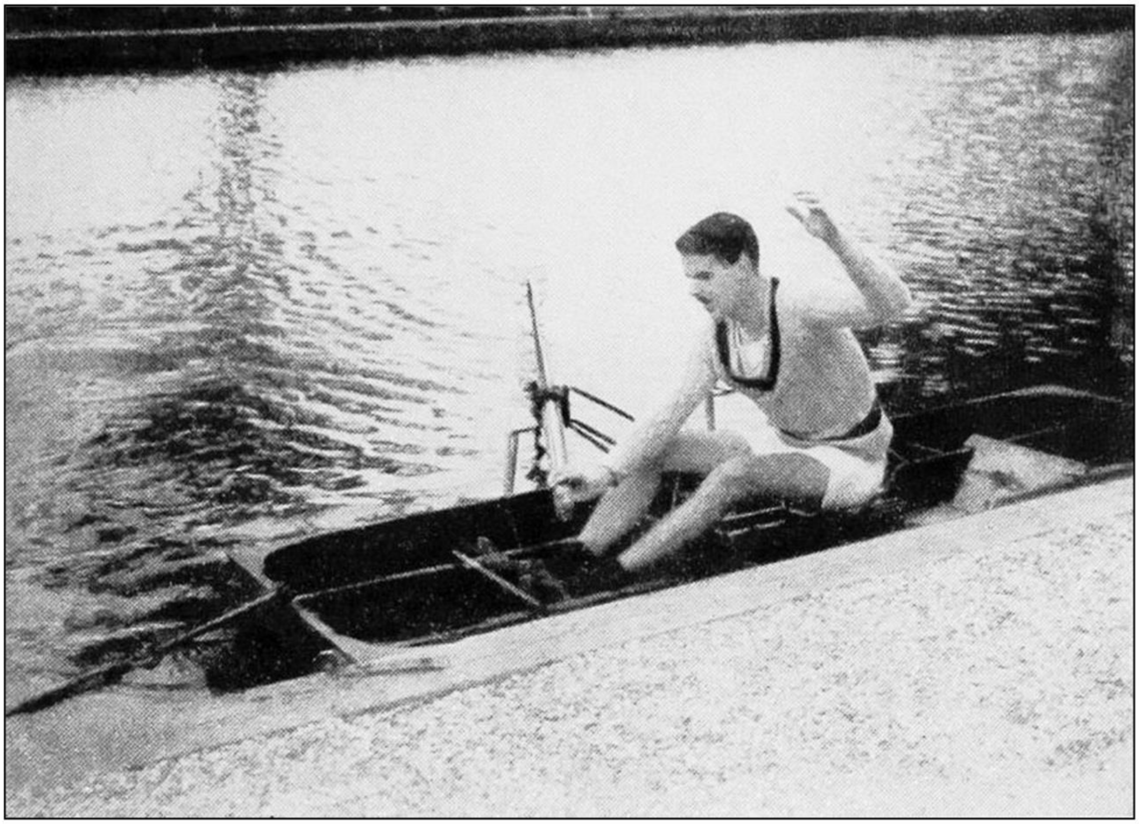
“The elastic spring and the steely fling
That drives the flying craft.”

The difference between the spring got from true Lateral Pressure and the result from pulling the oar away is similar to the difference between riding in a well-sprung Rolls Royce and a springless dray. Of course, after a time, the Lateral Pressure becomes automatic, but getting this spring from the push through puts elasticity into the stroke, and this elastic spring is the basis of rowing a fast stroke; in fact, it gives “the willowy sway of the hands away” of the master oarsman.

Having illustrated Lateral Pressure, get each man to row several strokes with the blade in the air, and test the Lateral Pressure by pulling at the oar.

Now we come to Balance and Control. The first thing to show here is that the inside hand is the main (if not only) factor in controlling and balancing the oar. At the finish, the outside hand and arm are at a wide angle to the oar, and the inside at a right angle, so it is in a better position to control the oar. At the finish the handle of the oar should be allowed to play in the outside hand, which, when coming forward, should be only just touching it. The oarsman balancing the oar should feel the blade in the hands, so to speak. That means a truly balanced and controlled oar, balanced on the sill of the rowlock.

The hand holding this balanced weight should feel it is leaning on the oar, and *the oar is drawing the oarsman forward*. That means true balance, true time, and an absence of tension. A very good exercise is to take the outside hand off the oar at the finish and bring the oar forward with the inside hand only, the outside hand gripping the oar for the pull when forward.



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The best way to teach a man that he must control the oar with the inside hand.

The oarsman should feel himself leaning on the oar, and floating out forward, and should feel the oar drawing him forward. He should feel the blade in his hands, that is feel the oar truly balanced on the sill of the rowlock. He should feel that the blade is leading all through the stroke, and *on no account should he ever pat the water on the feather to level the boat*. This is a fatal habit. If he starts touching the water on the feather he will never learn the true balance, and patting the water upsets the crew.

All races are won by the crew with the best forward swing. What the oarsman has to attempt, on the forward swing, is to feel the oar balanced in the air, to feel that he is leaning on it, and it is drawing him out, to feel he is floating forward at rest, with absolutely no tension, and to feel the boat running out from under him, and to imagine the run of the boat is bringing him forward.

Then, *and only then*, will the subjective mind bring the right muscles into play, unconsciously, to bring him forward, and they will bring him forward easiest, truest, fastest, and farthest, and he will gather on the stretcher forward, to strike truly.

I repeat this forward swing frequently, because, from experience, I know the learner requires a lot of repetition to get points into him, *and all races are won by the crew with the easiest forward swing*.

In bringing the oar forward with the inside hand only, one can keep the outside hand close to the handle sometimes, and at other times put it high in the air, bringing it round with a timing movement just to reach the oar full forward. The oar should be gripped by the fingers, and held firmly, but not rigidly. The inside hand strikes the blade into the air at the finish with a sharp, downward, rounded movement, the blade having been started to turn just previously.

It is a delicate, complicated, sleight-of-hand movement. Just as the oar is started to turn, the weight of the oar is transferred, like a flash of lightning, from being pulled against the rowlock, to being balanced on the sill. At the same time all the limbs are reversed in their movement from back to forward; so also are the muscles that move the weight by pushing the stretcher, and the muscles that apply the weight to propel the boat (by drawing at the oar) come to rest, from having been applied at their hardest, and the weight is transferred to the seat from the stretcher.

When forward, all these movements are reversed again, and it is the reversing of all those movements that makes the difficulty of timing at the turns. The timing on to the feather — that is, flicking the blade into the air, and balancing the oar on to the sill, and starting the hands away — is done in a fractional instant of time, while the limbs are gathering to reverse their movements. It is the inside hand that whips the oar round the turns, and the oarsman should thoroughly understand that the handle of the oar, which is travelling towards him about twice the pace he is moving at, has got to be drawn round the turn, turned and started away *with an endless chain movement*. The oarsman cannot think over this too often, and he should visualise this endless chain movement, till it becomes a part of himself. It is the most difficult movement to make correctly, that is, in true time, because oarsmen are very apt to think they have completed this movement before they have actually done so; thus they break the time, and take the weight off too soon, and start the forward swing too soon, and so ruin the rhythm of the stroke.

My most common expressions are: “Sit back at the finish, till the cows come home,” and when forward “Poise.” No one will sit back, or poise, after the turn is made, but the idea that one rows to a sit back helps one to avoid hurrying the finish. If you row with the idea of sitting back till the cows come home, you will find the cows have come home with you.

To row the stroke right out is the quickest way into the next stroke, and to think of rowing to a sit back ensures this. Does one really sit back at the finish, or is it coaching by exaggeration? That is a question I strongly urge each oarsman to think out for himself. The more he thinks about this point, the more he is setting his timing, the most important thing in all athletics and in all machinery. (Let me repeat that the athlete is only a human machine.)

I have an open mind on the subject, but I am inclined to the opinion that one does really sit back for a fraction of time while the body is reversing its movements, but it is a very small fraction. The mind is apt to get ahead of the muscles and to imagine that they have finished their work before they have. Thus, thinking of sitting back at the finish and poising forward helps to check the human tendency to rush the turns.

Golf makes plain the difficulty of timing more, perhaps, than any other form of athletics. All golfers know that the head and eye are apt to go up to see the ball in flight before one has struck the ball. That is merely because the mind imagines that the muscles travel faster than they do; and concludes that the club has reached the ball before it has made the contact. Thousands of golfers no doubt have — as I have — gone to the first tee, out of practise, determined to keep the eye on the ball, and to keep the head down. Even so, on many occasions, I have jerked my head up so quickly that I have ricked my neck and missed the shot. J.H. Taylor, the man who has won the English Golfing Championship more often than anyone else [1894, 1895, 1900, 1090, 1913 – P.M.], used to put his cap down behind the ball, and pick it up after the stroke, before he looked at the ball's flight. Here is illustrated the principle involved in my expression: "Sit back till the cows come home."

To realise the necessity of not hurrying into the forward swing (that is, chasing the next stroke) is the most important thing in rowing. Timing is taking time, and the two points where one is apt to hurry the timing are at the two turns, where one has to make a great many reversing movements, and the turns are really clever sleight-of-hand tricks.

Of the two turns, the turn at the finish is the more difficult, because one is turning the oar into the air from the water, and this is the point at which one is most likely to roll the boat. But both are very important, and one cannot do better than think of sitting back at the finish and poising forward. Actually, the oarsman will not sit back once the turn is made, but he will go nearer to rowing the stroke out, *which is the quickest way into the next stroke*.

I hope the oarsman can now visualise himself drawing the oar back to come truly to the turn. Just as he is arriving at the sit-back position, he should whip the oar round the turn, by giving a final pull that throws the boat away in one direction, and throws the water away in the other. The secret of a true, hard, clean finish is not thinking of getting forward at the turn, but thinking of rowing the body away from the oar and whipping it round the turn. The full stroke should be — "Take a hold of the water as hard as you can, row it through harder, and finish it out hardest." — (Jimmy Hastie, Chapter 1, Verse 1). Whipping the oar round the turn is a rounded movement. The weight applied by the inside hand flicks the turning blade into the air. To do this one must strike downwards, and this downward strike must be a lightning flick. Many a man tries to take the oar out gingerly, with the idea that he is placing the weight delicately on the sill. This is the heaviest and clumsiest way. The harder and faster the strike down, the quicker the blade flies into the air, and the lighter the movement. Taking the oar out of the water gingerly, and bringing it forward gingerly, keeps it hanging heavily on the rowlock, and makes the rowlock seem to be sinking away, whereas a sharp strike imparts momentum, and the blade flies into the air with the rowlock chasing it.

I have taken oarsmen out in a fixed rowlock tub and I have shown them how, if one strikes the blade sharply into the air and there is no string on the rowlock, the oar will fly into the air off the rowlock, so that after the lightning strike there is no weight on the rowlock. Therein lies the faculty for getting a true finish and balance. Also, the harder and faster the strike, the less it depresses the rowlock; in fact, the rowlock seems to resent the oar striking it and pushes the oar up and chases it into the air.

The principle here is the same as in taking a bandage off a wound — if one goes to work very gingerly and delicately, one hurts the patient, but one sharp, strong flick and the bandage is off.

I have many a time, in a tub, struck the blade into the air on the balance, and brought the blade vertically above my head. This requires a downward pressure with the outside hand and an upward pull with the inside hand, directly after the strike, but, when one gets the strike properly, it is surprising how easily the blade goes right up.

The weight applied by the inside hand brings the oar on to the balance, and one should flick it freely into the air. The idea of trying to make a beginner carry the blade close to the water, like a finished oar does, is wrong. It conveys a wrong idea. The first thing is to teach him to flick his blade firmly into the air, and to learn to control it.

The best lesson to teach this is “feather high.” The beginner should have it driven into him that touching the water on the feather is fatal. The best exercise for this “feather high” is to make the crew, every now and again, carry their oars in the air as high as possible. If an oarsman can hold his blade high in the air all through the forward swing, he will learn balance and control. So illustrate the “feather high,” and put all the crew through it in the fixed tub.

Many an oarsman gets the idea that, as he is coming forward, he must bring the blade gradually nearer the water, so as to be able to grip the water quickly. This is wrong. It rolls the boat by varying the weight on the oar, and the oarsman loses control. Further, he gets the blade too near the water, and so has to dip the handle down, to allow the blade to turn clear of the water.

Consequently, just as the blade should be rowed down and into the water, it is being rowed up and away from the water. I had a lot of difficulty in getting one of England’s best oarsmen out this habit of feeling for the water.

As a rule, oarsmen do not realise how easy it is to row the blade into the water, if it be done correctly. The weight should be kept applied so as to hold the blade firmly in the air all through the forward swing, and the blade should be held flat on the feather, till all but right forward. It should be held firmly controlled — not allowed to lie floppily — and with the idea that one is ready to square the blade in a flash. Be sure to bring the bottom part of the loom of the oar firmly against the thole, or rowing-pin, and the bottom part of the blade just past a right angle with the water.

To master this, and to exercise complete control, one should learn to keep the oar balanced on the bottom part of the loom of the oar. When the blade is feathered, this is the front part of the loom, which, of course, when square, is the bottom part. One cannot get the oarsman's thoughts fixed too firmly on this part of the loom, and on realising that he balances the oar on it coming forward and poises forward to give the oar time to complete this turn.

Let the coach illustrate the strike, the feather high, holding the oar controlled on the front part of the loom, and carrying the blade right forward on the feather, leaning on the oar, with it drawing him out. And then let him show how the blade will be automatically turned if one is leaning on the oar all the way forward, and pushing it forward till one gets to the full reach. When one gets to the full reach, the oar being continuously moved away, one is stretched like a piece of elastic; then, if one still keeps moving the oar forward, in a lightning flick, *the hands will turn and move upward and forward till the blade is truly square and firm against the thole*.

At this instant, the whole body is stretched like a piece of elastic, and there is no more power or ability to make a further forward movement. Thus, the elastically-stretched body starts to spring back to relax the stretch. At this moment the hands are half-way between the plane in which they bring the oar forward and the plane in which they row the oar back; and the blade has been squared with a rounded downward movement, and is a few inches off the water.

Now is the time to commence the stroke, and one springs off the stretcher and rows the blade in. So you get the endless chain movement, a very different thing from dropping the oar in.

"Square the blade and poise" is the cry. The "poise" is to give that instant of time to reverse all the movements of the body, and to make sure that the blade is squared — in fact, to set the timing. The tendency at this moment is to start the stroke before the forward movement is completed, and before the blade is squared, all of which is advancing the timing too much, and getting a broken-armed, back-fire result.

So let the coach illustrate coming forward with the blade balanced very high, and especially illustrate how quickly and easily one can take this turn, and reach the water, and strike it truly, from a very high balance. This is the result of the natural action of the hands rising to get that last bit of forward movement by turning the oar and squaring the blade, with a forward and upward movement, never that down turn of the hands, often done but fatal to good rowing. It is very important to acquire a true, natural turn. Once gained, it will impart confidence, and is, of course, the truest, the easiest, the quickest and the strongest movement. Grasp this thoroughly and you are a made oarsman.

Once more remember, all the way forward, one should feel oneself leaning on the oar to balance it, and one should feel as if the oar was drawing one out. The feeling coming forward should be as if one were floating out at perfect rest. It is the diminution of all tension, or effort, that purifies the forward swing; then one feels perfectly at rest. Tension and effort are the result of fear, arising from a desire to beat the other crew, instead of the desire being only to do one's best. Fear comes from not having thoroughly grasped the principles of rowing. They are, *balance and timing*. Therefore, study what is written here about these principles, think them over, and the more you grasp the principles, the better you will row, and the more you will enjoy it.

(II) THE FORWARD SWING

The coach should go on to explain that *all races are won by the crew with the easiest forward swing*, because the easier the forward swing the faster and longer and truer it will be, and the slower and shorter and lazier it will look (one of the many anomalies of rowing). Feel your feet on the stretcher, feel the boat running out from under you, feel you are floating forward at perfect rest, feel you are coming forward to square the blade and poise, as you gather on the stretcher to spring and strike the boat, *and imagine the run of the boat is bringing you out*. Then, and only then, the muscles that bring you forward will act truly, unconsciously governed by the subjective mind.

What are the right muscles? I don't know. I dare say a doctor could tell us. In my early days the pros told me they hooked the boat past them with the toes drawing at the straps. I used to coach and say that was too advanced for the beginner, and that I did not do it myself, as the danger was that one would, in this way, shuffle the slide up first, and so destroy a truly balanced swing.

I used to coach for rowing without straps in the tub, and this is a very good exercise to balance the swing. One day I looked at my feet, and to my surprise the heels were jammed hard against the stretcher, and the toes were drawing hard at the straps — *the subjective mind had taken possession and governed the movement unconsciously, and I was hooking the boat past me.*

No doubt, this drawing at the straps is the right way to get forward. If one taught oarsmen to draw the body forward with the straps, one would get a shuffling movement as a result; but if one taught to hook the boat past the rower, one would get a correct result. I believe the toes bring into play those right muscles, unknown to me and to most oarsmen, that bring the body forward, just as the push with the foot brings in the muscles that drive the body back.

Let anyone try, and he will see, when sitting forward on a chair with the feet in the air, that he can't bring the body forward, any more than he can move it back. Undoubtedly, one ought to teach the rower to hook the boat past with the toes. But the difference between hooking the boat past and hooking the body up is as far as the poles apart. Hooking the body up is dangerous and is “orthodoxy”, fixing the thought on the body instead of moving the boat — which is Fairbairnism, or, I would prefer to call it, true orthodoxy.

Perfect the forward swing by perfecting the balance, and remember the easier the forward swing the better the stroke. Not only will the swing be truer, easier, quicker, and longer, but also one comes on to the stretcher properly gathered to strike, and so lets the boat run farther. I always say one should be able to row forty, eat his dinner, and go to sleep on the forward swing.

Harking back to hooking the boat along with the toes, I remember one day my old friend Hutch and I got into an eight, just above the Railway Bridge on the Cam, without oars, and illustrated the difference between bucketing and Slow Forward. I had said that one tends to drive the boat back, the other to draw it forward. We illustrated, and we made the boat go both ways, one way by drawing the boat up and the other by jerking the body forward.

Besides Feathering High, other good exercises for Balance are “Lift! Lower!” and “Waggle!” The coach should illustrate these in the fixed tub and get the crew to do them. It won’t be the same as in a moving boat, but it will enable the crew to understand the principles. At the word “Lift!” strike sharply on to the handle of the oar and bring the blade into the air. At the word “Lower!” lower the blade on to the water with a smart, elastic, controlled movement (no drop). Then give the word, “Lift! Lower!” quickly, and so help the men to get an idea of it.

In the eight, this exercise will be found much harder to do. First one side and then the other will remain with their oars sticking on the water after “Lift!” but after a time the crew will get the hang of it. The movement is somewhat similar to striking from, and on to, the balance — that is, transferring the weight of the oar from sill to thole, and thole to sill, with a lightning flick. The exercise would be better if one could “lift” and feather the blade and “lower” and square the blade as is done at the turns when rowing. “Lift! Lower!” with practise, helps to steady the boat.

At first, when one side’s blades stick on the water, the subjective mind sets itself to rectify this, by getting a quicker strike. It is only a sluggish strike that rolls the boat, or an incomplete turn, which makes an oar run down and pull the boat down. Practising this “lift” gives that lightning flick change of the weight of the oar from sill to thole, and thole to sill, that is the hall-mark of the first-class oar. It makes rowing easy.

Watch old oars at Henley walking about, and you will see them making flicking movements with the hand. They are mentally whipping the oar round the turn, and flicking the blade into the air on the balance and starting the hands away.

The “Waggle” is another exercise that is very useful. At the word “one” strokeside should raise their hands smartly, and bowside lower theirs, at “two” reverse. This rolls the boat very much; the object being to let the beginner see how varying the weight on the oar handle rolls the boat. Repeat “one”, “two” frequently and then “three” — come to “easy”. It illustrates how varying the weight on the handle of the oar rolls the boat, and should go a long way towards imbuing an oarsman with the idea that he must keep a steady, even weight on the handle of the oar.

It is mostly fear of boat-rolling that rolls the boat, and I believe the best corrective to this fear is to try to roll the boat. I have tried this sometimes, and I believe it would destroy all fear, and end in giving control. My elder son [Sydney George Fairbairn, 1892-1943, international cricketer for Marylebone Cricket Club. He was wounded at Gallipoli during the Kaiser’s War and died on active service in London during World War II. – P.M.], when eight or nine years old, skating in Switzerland [Sydney was skating on a large rink in Morgins, on the French border, a favourite resort for Brits and home of the Bear Club, a stronghold of the English school of skating. – P.M.], used to throw himself down, time after time, and count his falls. The result was he got a wonderful balance, and became a very good skater. He passed his Little Bear, which carried a seat on the Committee, and at his first committee meeting, where all the others were international skaters, he was proposing a motion when the nurse took him off to bed!

Once I was coaching a pair to roll the boat to get control, and they were both trying to roll her. They did one of the steadiest and best pieces of rowing I ever saw; they both screamed with laughter.

I remember once, when a boy, I was sculling, just beginning, and a man threw a lump of mud at me. I caught it, threw it back, and took hold of my sculls without a move in the boat. Then I remembered, I ought to have fallen out, as I had let go of the sculls.

Bill Beach , the finest sculler I ever saw, bought a sculling boat to go several miles upriver to shoot ducks, and thus learnt to scull. I wonder if he dropped the sculls to shoot, or if he got out! He had a wonderful balance, and he sat on a very high seat, right above the saxe boards. I often think we have not exploited the high seat enough. But then Hoover [Walter Hoover, American, Duluth Boat Club. – P.M.], won the [1922] Diamonds sitting abnormally low. Thus we get more of the anomalies of rowing.

(III) WORKING THE BLADE

Now we come to the most important part: rowing the oar through the water to propel the boat.

In the forward swing, the oarsman is coming forward to square his blade and poise, while he gathers on the stretcher to spring and strike the water with his blade. Springing from the stretcher sends the weight flying back, *and this generates the power to hit the boat; for the stroke is a hit*. It is not a “drop-the-blade-in” and lug.

My method is to concentrate on working the blade and forgetting the body, but I will give an instance of a body movement that happened to me once, to show how the spring must be a full spring, that is, a full jump back.

I was bow in a tub pair, coaching my nephew [George Eric Fairbairn, 1888-1915, winner of the 1908 Boat Race and Silver Medallist in the 1908 Olympic Coxless-Pairs. Killed in action in Bailleul during the Kaiser's War. – P.M.] and I said, on starting, "We will go for the catch. I want you to hit the boat, as you row the blade into the water."

On the first stroke, though I was not rowing hard, the oar came in two at the button, and it parted in an extraordinary way. It carried forward all right, but it never made contact with the water. I gave a spring, and went to row the blade in, but I was at once aware that the oar had parted and I checked my spring instantly. In spite of that, my body flew through the air, and I landed wedged in the bows of the boat. I had not applied a quarter of my full spring.

Had I rowed my hardest, and kept the push going, instead of instantly checking it, I would, I feel sure, have driven the bows open and shot into the water. The point is that I had no idea that one made such a galloping spring, when rowing the blade in. What I think happened was that the oar had been previously broken right through, and stuck back into the leather.

This episode occurred at the Melbourne Rowing Club, of which I had just taken over the captaincy. The club had been defunct for some time, and some broken oars had probably been stuck together.

I got another oar, and smashed it with the first stroke. Then I smashed two more. Smashing an oar is not a clever or powerful thing. When an oar breaks, the most common reason is that it has been previously strained by having caught a bad crab.

Square the blade and poise, as I have frequently said already. I repeat the important points frequently, because I know it requires a good deal of repetition to get the lesson home to many an oarsman.

I was coaching a Queensland crew once, and got out a crew of old oarsmen to race them. We beat them. I explained a point to the Stroke, and he said: "Oh! that is what you told the old crew, and that is why they beat us."

I said to him, "If I have told you this point once, I have told you twenty times, but now I've got a crew to beat you, you are beginning to sit up and take notice." Moral: intending oarsmen take notice of this weakness of mine for repetition.

The poise to which I have referred is to gather to strike. At the strike, one drives the body right out, the back being elastically rounded like a piece of whalebone, and the body, from feet to hands, is stretched right out. The slide is driving right back that part of the body farthest from feet and hands, and so stretching the body right out. The blade is driven into the water, and the full weight of the body, springing from the stretcher, is drawn on to the oar by the hands. It strikes the water with the blade, and draws the boat along, by drawing at the rowing pin.

As the slide drives out, and the blade strikes the water, the weight comes off the seat, and one sees many of the best oarsmen when working on the tank rising into the air off the seat as they drive the body out. To get this strike true, the body has to be held taut; the shoulders can and should be driven as though stretched out of their sockets. But at this instant the body must be gathered to strike; the muscles that draw the weight on to the oar, and draw the boat along, must be held controlled, and ready to get the full strike and continuous draw.

This is a very important point. One gets the full and true catch by playing for the bell note, and one gets the draw by watching the blade cut evenly, as far and as fast as possible, through the water. And to carry the blade (and consequently the weight of the body) right through the stroke, one must watch the water at the finish, and endeavour to make it come up as if boiling.

To get the weight coupled truly to the oar, as it strikes the water and is driven through, a very good exercise is to row with the elbows bent. The old “orthodox” idea of rowing with the arms straight very often had the result of locking the arms straight, and once an oarsman gets this locked straight arm it is very hard to get him to alter to a continuous, elastic draw.

I have had several promising oarsmen who had been coached at school for this stiff straight arm action, and have found it the ruin of their rowing. If the oarsman starts the stroke with the elbow joints slightly bent, he will find that it is very easy to keep the weight continuously applied. It keeps the arms alive.

“Orthodoxy” used to say that you must not pull with your arms because you will tire them, and keep your weight from doing the work. One does not, and cannot, tire the arms by pulling at the oar. It brings the muscles down the back into play and not the arms. I have asked many a crew to do their utmost to try and tire their arms, with the result they move the boat much better, but they cannot tire their arms. Of course, it does not keep the weight of the body out; it brings the weight in.

This draw is very important, though I fancy I am the only coach who coaches for it. [Not quite true in the 21st Century, but those who coach arms alive are still in the minority. – P.M.] I strongly advise everyone to study it. An even, elastic draw, making the water boil at the finish, means real rowing. The weight applied to the handle of the oar travels the distance the arms reach, farther than the distance the body moves per stroke.

Let us say, to make it simple, the oar handle moves twice as far as the body, so that it has to be drawn at twice the pace at which the body moves throughout the stroke, and all movements must be mechanically even, so the arms have to be alive, and start bending and moving towards the body practically at once.

It is very noticeable that locked elbows and straight arms are disappearing. Many a good oarsman is bending the arms very quickly; this only means applying more weight. Hoover, the [1922] Diamond Sculls winner, was a noteworthy example of the value of bent arms producing the true cut through of the blade. This live arm draw is the only way to get the even and continuous application of the weight. My experience tells me that the best way to get the blade cutting through truly is by watching it work till one learns to sense the feel of it. The old “orthodox” cry of “keep your eyes in the boat” was wicked.

Keep your mental eye on moving the boat, yes; that is concentration. But to do this, look at your blade as much as you like. One can sense its movements eventually by feel.

I have always found that telling a beginner to watch his blade, and to make it cut through, will in five minutes, bring him to manipulating his blade correctly, whereas, when working through the body and not the blade, I found it used to take fully two years of teaching body-form to get the same truly controlled movement of the blade, which means the same true working of the body.

This is not exaggeration. I used to tub for body-form at first, and I noticed the truly drawn blade only began to show regularly at the end of the second year; and now, coaching for watching the blade, I can get the same true blade in ten minutes. So the best way to get the blade to work truly through the water is to watch it; and to make it feather high and carry forward truly and evenly is also to watch it. Further, watch your blade moving evenly through the air freely, away from the water, and sometimes waggle it in the air to sense the feeling that the blade is in your hands. This feeling will give you a true balance.

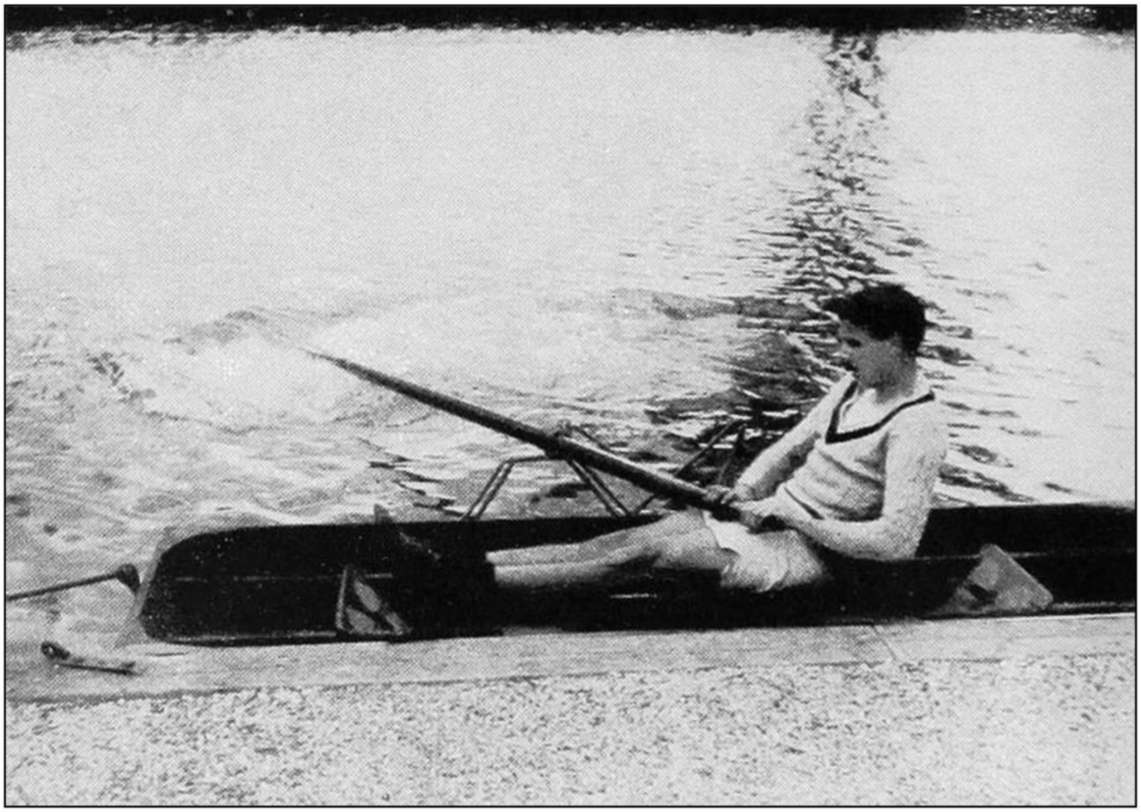
Feel the blade ring as it strikes the water, feel the even draw, and feel the even weight on the oar that balances it in the air, and feel the throw away that ensures a good finish, and feel the button pressing against the rowlock, and keep the thought entirely concentrated on these actions of the oar, and remember to row every stroke at your best. Every stroke well rowed does good to the whole crew, as well as to your own rowing; remember that the race is only an illustration of how you rowed each stroke in practise, *and so the next stroke is really the race*.

Having illustrated in the fixed tub and put the crew through their different movements, impress upon the crew you are coaching that it is very necessary to practise as frequently as possible in the fixed tub, and to row a certain number of strokes *on each side* every day. This is very important, and is the hardest thing to get the oarsmen to do. It is very noticeable how those who do most practise in the fixed tub get into the first boat eventually.

Rowing on both sides is very necessary, because an oarsman rowing on one side only gets lopsided. It is the inside hand that does the feathering, and if a man rows only on one side he finds changing over very difficult, because the outside hand becomes the inside hand (that is the one nearest the rowlock), and it has to make movements which it is not accustomed to make. It has to do the control and balance and the turning of the oar, etc., which is very difficult at first.

If a man is wanted for a higher boat to row on the side he isn't accustomed to, he will roll the boat for some time, and possibly lose his chance if he has not practised this side in the fixed tub. But the main reason for working on both sides is, rowing on one side only tends to make a man one-sided and clumsy.

The coach should row in the fixed tub several strokes, at first merely the catch — that is, just squaring the blade and striking the water, the blade working a few inches. When practising in the fixed tub one should practise this catch frequently; in fact, one cannot do too much of this catch. The coach should explain that one does not get the same bell note, or boiling water result, in the fixed tub as in the moving boat.



Stearn & Sons

"The willowy sway of the hands away
And the water boiling aft."

After practising the catch only, of course, row full strokes. Another very good thing is to row the finish only.

The important points about the fixed tub are that it does not roll, and does not move forward. Thus it is very much easier to get the turns correctly and row the blade correctly than in a moving boat, and doing a thing correctly makes it easier to reproduce. The rolling of a moving boat sets up fear, and destroys the timing movements, and also it is harder with the moving thole to find the water. To push the boat along by something (the thole) moving in the same direction, is difficult. So one will make the strokes correctly much quicker in the fixed tub, and making the strokes correctly helps one's rowing more than all the coaching. Again, when rowing in the fixed tub one has to drive the blade through eleven feet or so of water, as against a very much shorter distance in a moving boat, and so it conditions the muscles quicker. I am sure that the more strokes one rows hard in a fixed tub, the more one fits oneself to race by firming up the muscles. Of course, long rows, early on, have the same effect. "Mileage makes Champions."

CHAPTER 7

Work in the Moving Tub

Tubbing in the moving tub is the next step. The coach should begin by explaining how to put the oars into the rowlocks, and then how to step in, one foot in the centre, so as not to roll the boat (first lesson in balance) and then how to hold the oar, so as to control the boat. It never seems to enter a beginner's mind that, from the moment he sits down and takes hold of the oar, he has to hold the oar controlled, and sit balanced, so as not to roll the boat. In fact, I doubt if a beginner even thinks the boat will roll or can be held level or steady. This sense needs developing, and it can't be impressed too much on him that the boat must be kept level. He ought not to need to be shown how to sit, as the fixed tubbing should have put that right.

There should be no stiffness; just sit naturally, loose and easy, feet firmly on the stretcher, hands holding the oar naturally in the fingers, the outside hand at the end of the oar, and the inside one about a hand's breadth away; the oar should play in the outside hand, and be turned with the inside hand.

The coach should watch the slightest roll of the boat, and point out what made it roll, and impress on each the absolute necessity of never doing anything to make the boat roll. He should begin by giving them a "Waggle" exercise and explain how varying the weight on the oar rolls the boat.

One can roll the boat much more by varying the weight on the oar than by moving the body. After the Waggle, a few strokes with the blade not truly squared, so that it slices in and runs down, and pulls the boat down. This will show the oarsman the necessity of squaring the blade properly, and rowing the oar truly against the thole. The importance of doing nothing to roll the boat cannot be driven in too hard.

The old, watermanlike oarsman, from the moment he gets into the boat till he gets out, takes up his true position, and never leaves it, and concentrates on keeping the boat controlled. Towards the end of my rowing career, I could take anyone out in a pair, and hold my rowlock so firm that the beginner was rowing practically on a raft. All oarsmen should work to get that control continuously from the first stroke, and the more their eyes are opened to the necessity of sitting balanced and of holding the oar balanced and controlled, of squaring the blade truly, and rowing it in one plane through the water, and in one plane through the air, and feeling the blade (so to speak) in one's hands, and of keeping the button up, the sooner they will learn to row.

Every time an oarsman rolls the tub, let the coach show him why he rolled it, and show him how to avoid that. In explaining it to the oarsman, let him understand that all beginners are apt to roll the boat, and don't treat him as if he had committed a crime. Therein lies the secret of successful coaching. If the coach can truthfully, say to the oarsman: "All beginners roll the boat at times, and you are better than a great many," that will buck him up. And all through coaching the coach can’t do better than pat the oarsman on the back with a word of praise whenever he sees him doing better.

I have seen a very successful oarsman pull his button away, and slice his blade in when paddling. He had been President of the C.U.B.C. and Captain of Leander.

Jesus men have often told me that they have pointed out to Blues that they, the Blues, were pulling their buttons away, and that they had no lateral pressure; and the Blues always replied they had never been taught it. Therein lies the success of Jesus rowing. Jesus men are taught to control the oar and the boat.

The coach cannot do better than start as in the fixed tub, by making the oarsmen row the blades in the air, pressing the button up against the rowlock all the time. After a few strokes in the air, let them row the blade through the water, and as they strike the water let them try to force the button through the rowlock, and as they flick the hands away at the finish let them do the same. This will give a beautifully elastic spring. The oar will spring away truly, and very elastically. This spring from true lateral pressure sets the foundation of a fast stroke.

After the lesson on lateral pressure, let the coach give his men the “Lift! Lower!” exercise, until they both strike into the air together. This is the best exercise for balance. It teaches the oarsmen to get that lightning flick of the blade into the air which means striking on to the balance without rolling the boat. In the tub, the oarsmen will soon get to flick the blade into the air without rolling the boat at all.

As I have said, if the coach can praise an oarsman honestly, it is the best form of coaching possible. It gives him confidence, and the greater the confidence the truer the rowing. When an oarsman makes a mistake, a judicious coach can do a great deal to prevent the oarsman from feeling disheartened by the mistake.

For Instance, suppose an oarsman, say No. 4, catches a bad crab, and can’t get his oar out. He stops the boat. Then I say: “Thank you, number four; I am glad you did that, because I wanted to point out how necessary it is for the other side to hold their riggers from rising too much, and so letting the other side’s riggers down. A crab is caught because the oarsman, feeling his rigger going down, gets nervous and hurried and does not square the blade, and so the oar runs down, and he catches a crab, which is more a bad mark to the opposite side. If the result of that crab teaches both sides that they must hold their riggers firm, you will have done a lot of good.” Thus the oarsman, instead of being bullied while he is feeling very miserable, has his confidence restored.

The keynote of success in coaching lies in showing each man that you are in sympathy with him, helping him over difficult places. Enumerating faults to individuals is fatal. I have in mind one coach who was always telling me (and the crew) how this one and that were late. He was very keen, and wanted to correct faults. He was always watching to see if anyone was late, and so at last he had them all late. Then he impressed each continuously to get rid of this fault, and so destroyed the crew.

To be always looking for faults and then correcting them is not the way to coach. If a coach wants to correct an oarsman he can either take him out in a tub and give him a lesson on the principle the oarsman is violating, and so, by inculcating the principle, eradicate the fault. Alternatively, he can give the crew a lesson on the principle, and so correct the defaulting oarsman, without even telling him of the fault, and so destroying his confidence.

Every time a coach tells an oarsman of a fault, he is doing harm. Say the oarsman is late. Let the coach take him in a tub and explain the principle he is breaking. If there is a tendency to rush, say to the pair, "I want you to square the blades and poise, I want you to feel your feet on the stretcher, and I want you to feel the boat running out from under you, and I want you to imagine the run of the boat is bringing you forward; then, and only then, will the right muscles act to bring you forward."

Tell them all races are won by the crew with the easiest forward swing and that is got by getting perfect rest, and it is eliminating all effort that gets this rest.

This coaching will eliminate all rush, and it is the rush from over-anxiety that makes a man late. The first thing that I noticed when I came to Cambridge was that the cry most frequently heard was: "Three, you are late," and I noticed that number three always became later! The trouble was that number three tried to get in to time by rushing more.

Moral: the coach should never tell a man of a fault, but he should teach the principle that is being broken.

Having gone through the Lateral Pressure and the Balance, giving the exercises "Feather High, feel the blade in your hands," as explained previously. The coach should go for working the blade through the water. It is best for him to begin by illustrating, by rowing himself. As he changes seats with stroke, he should see that the balance isn't disturbed by changing over, and he should teach the new steerer how to sit and hold the rudder lines.

To get the balance level, the cox should move his weight, to adjust the difference in weight of the oarsmen. Tub pairs for coaching should be side seated, and the cox will have to move his weight somewhat to the side in which the lighter man sits. Having the cox balanced correctly, the coach should then fix him in. He should sit with feet pressing against the stretcher, and the back against a rest, body held taut, and rudder strings held tight, and when he puts on the rudder he still must hold both strings stretched. Sitting thus helps the men to row, and flopping about makes the boat heavy and unsteady.

The next thing for a coach to say is: "I am going to row; and to give me the best chance you must both be careful to keep the boat controlled. You, Bow, must keep firm and even weight on your rowlock, so as to hold it firm, *and so keep mine firm*, and thus help my rowing."

If the coach, when rowing feels the boat left uncontrolled, either by the cox lolling about or the bow not holding his rowlock firm, he should pull them up, and explain that they must be very careful, all their rowing career, to do their utmost to hold the boat controlled.

Then he should tell them both to watch his blade carefully, because he will want them to imitate it. Then let him row a few strokes, some the catch only, and let him point out how that makes the boat jump, and some striking the water with a good bell note, and some cutting through long and evenly, pointing out the even cutting movement of the blade and the boiling swirl of the water at the finish.

He should criticise each stroke, then let bow row a few strokes, some catch only, and some full. All should be watching and the coach drawing attention to improvement in catch, or drive through, or swirl. Now, a few strokes together.

When rowing singly, row a few strokes together first to get steerage way on, and then easy one and get the cox to put on the rudder, against the single rower.

In this way the boat can be held straight, and this rowing against the rudder is the best way to start. After a little time, let bow steer and the steerer go bow or stroke and repeat the performance. Then coach steer and single work for the oarsmen, first one and then the other, the coach watching pointing out improvements, and all watching the working blade.

After a time, let the coach ask which of the last three (or more) strokes was the best. I have found they can always tell you.

In doing the single strokes, keep them watching the blade for some time, asking them to feel and sense what the blade is doing, and then get them to row with the eyes shut, and then vary the sequence — looking at the blade, looking away, and eyes shut. Explain that they can look to see what the blade is doing, but they must eventually learn to know what it is doing by feel.

Soon after this I get to talking to them as one rows — always one at a time (keep them rowing singly for a long time) — asking them if they rowed at school, what games they played, what is their weight, and then — “Which was the best of the last four strokes?” They can always tell you.

Then point out, “You can sense what you are doing although talking of something else; so, by concentrating and feeling what you are doing, and trying to do it better, you can coach yourself better than anyone else can coach you. All you have got to do is to feel what your blade is doing, and keep on trying to do it better. Try to make the boat jump more, by ringing the blade; try to make the boat travel farther by making the blade cut through farther, and try to get into the next stroke quicker, by making the water come up boiling.

“You know what you are doing, and you know the best stroke; so you can keep playing for it. You have no more need of a coach. No coach can help you as you can help yourself, by concentrating on and trying to improve the blade-work. All you have to do is to concentrate on the blade-work and try at every stroke to make the bell note better, the draw through better, and the swirl at the finish better.”

That one tubbing should be sufficient, and if the oarsman will concentrate on the instructions no coach in the world can help him as much as he can help himself.

I have tubbed many people, and have always found the one tubbing sufficient, and a journey of about a mile each way generally is enough. That one tubbing, many an oarsman has told me afterwards, made all the difference to his rowing.

I don’t advise too much tubbing, but let each oarsman practise frequently in the fixed tub on both sides. At the most twice a week per man should be enough tubbing, and then let it be nothing but watching the blade and working it. *No body-form*. Every word on body-form does harm. It takes the thought from moving the boat to positioning the body, and the easiest way to position the body is to let off the work, and the only way to move the boat and learn to row is to work the oar hard.

Bill Beach, the finest sculler I ever saw, had a round back, sat abnormally high in his boat, the wheels of his slide were six inches in diameter, and his sculls went very high in the air. No flash form about him. In fact, when he came to England with Peter Kemp [1853-1921, a protégé of Beach who succeeded him as World Professional Singles Champion in 1888. – P.M.], a showy sculler, people thought they had changed names, because Kemp caught the eye so much more. Yet when they raced, the round-backed slogger won.

Jesus men told me when I came to Cambridge that the round-backed sloggers (Hockin [Thomas E. Hockin, Radley and Jesus College, seven times Head of the River, winning the Boat Race twice and rowing directly behind Charlie Fairbairn in 1879. – P.M.], Muttlebury [Stanley Duff Muttlebury, 1866-1933, Eton and 3rd Trinity, at 13 st. 10 lb, the largest oarsman of his era, larger than Fairbairn. He won the Boat Race for Cambridge four years straight, the first two sitting just in front of Steve. – P.M.], Guy Nickalls [1866-1936, won the Boat Race twice, the Grand Challenge Cup three times, the Wingfield Sculls twice (once beating Fairbairn), the Diamond Sculls five times, the Stewards’ Cup seven times, the Silver Goblets seven times, and the 1908 Olympic Championship in the British “Old Crocks” Eight. – P.M.], Don Burnell [Charles Desborough Burnell, 1876-1969, Eton and Magdalen, 1895-98 Boat Race Winner for Oxford, 1908 Olympic Champion in the British “Old Crocks” Eight. – P.M.], etc.) will always beat the showy-looking oar because the round-backed slogger’s rowing is true, and the pretty man is sacrificing power to flashiness.

CHAPTER 8

Forming the Eights

Having done the fixed tubbing, and the tubbing, the next thing is to take the crews out in eights. I have always, from the beginning of the rowing year, made the crews up as nearly as possible in order of merit. The custom was to mix the crews, make them as nearly equal as might be, and row a trial eight (or crock eight) race at the end of the first term.

This is not nearly so good as making the crews up at once. Each man then feels that he is in a representative boat, and takes far more interest in it. They all feel that they are working for their college or club for the coming races. The idea in mixing the oarsmen was that the older oarsmen would help the beginners. I very much doubt that. Anyway, the old oarsmen would feel the work heavy, and the boat rolling a lot. They would not derive any benefit from it, and the old oars would make the boat move fast, and so make it harder for the beginners to get a hold of the water.

Then, again, the idea was to work up for a race. This can be done equally well, when the boats are in order of merit, by making a handicap for each crew and working up for a lock-to-lock race at the end of term.

This is a long-distance race against the clock. The long-distance race teaches the young oar how to row better than anything else could, and rowing against the clock is better than breast racing, especially for beginners.

But the great point is that all the crews will be kept together for the year, and it is continuous practise together that makes a crew. They will start their second term far ahead of what they would do if they were just made up as a crew for the first time. They would not have the tumbling about of a fresh crew, so their rowing would be better and much more enjoyable. This would be much more so the third term. Of course, if an oarsman showed improvement he should be moved up a boat, so the crews may have some changes. The success of Thames and Jesus has been largely due to this system.

ROWING THE EIGHT

A boat well launched is half rowed, and one can usually pick the winning crew by the way it launches the boat. The coach should say to the cox, “Get the boat out!” The cox then calls, “Stand by first (or other) eight!” The men go to their boat and stand against, or opposite, their riggers (the boat being usually on a rack, bottom up). They should put one hand across the boat.

The cox then calls, “Lift!” They lift her out, turn her over, and the side who are alongside their riggers hold her, and the other side goes under. The best way to hold a boat is to hold the outside riggers well up, and to let the boat rest on the thigh. The best way to carry the boat out is for the men to stand opposite, 7 and Stroke behind Stroke’s rigger, 6 and 5 behind six’s, 4 and 5 in front of three’s, and Bow and 2 in front of Bow’s. They should march in step, and swing the boat parallel with the river.

At the word “Bow- (or Stroke-) side under!” the other side should take hold of the boat putting one hand across, tilt it up, and rest it on the thigh. This is much easier than holding it without the thigh support.

At the word “Launch!” the crew launch the boat, get their oars, and put them in the rowlocks. At the word “Step!” the crew put one foot on the keelson; at the word “In!” they take hold of the oar, step in, the cox with them, and all give a hard push with the foot on the bank, so pushing the boat out into the river, as they sit down. Then the coach should say, “Hold her controlled!”

That is the drill for beginners.

Soon, on the command, “Stand by, first eight!” and when ready “Lift!” the crew can do the whole of the launch from this word, taking time from Stroke.

A well-drilled launch goes a long way towards developing the team spirit, and will help the rowing very much. The crew that launches the boat best is a sure winner.

After being launched, if the boat has to cross the river to get to its right side, the cox should say, “Two strokes (or more) together!” and the crew should row that number of strokes at the word “together”, and sit with the blades balanced in the air. Then, at the word “Lower!” the crew should, smartly and holding the oar controlled, lower the blades on to the water, and sit controlled, and ready to row.

Then the coach should say: “I want you to do the ‘Waggle’.” This exercise shows the crew how, by raising or lowering their hands, and so varying the weight of their oar, the boat is thrown out of balance. It impresses the importance of keeping an even weight on the oar and rowing it in one plane.

This is the “Waggle”: at the word “one” strokeside raise their hands smartly, and bowside lower theirs. At “two” reverse, and at “three” come to the level. Then give “one”, “two”, several times and then “three”. At “three” it will be very noticeable that the crew are sitting holding their bodies controlled, and the oars are holding the boat firm.

Point this out to the crew, and explain how the subjective mind has taken possession and put the body into a controlled position, and so has done the right thing unconsciously. Then say: “Cox, I want you to throw your body about and try to roll the boat.” He will be surprised to find how firmly the crew are holding the boat. Next, let each man try to roll her in turn, and the boat will get firmer and firmer.

It would be a very good thing to ask the cox and each oarsman to try to roll the boat in turn before the “Waggle” exercise. After the exercise, they will see how much firmer they are holding the boat, the subjective mind unconsciously introducing control. Then say: “Paddle on 20 strokes and easy on the 20th, with blades flat on the water.”

It will be noticeable how the young crew will easy, *and let the control go*. Point out to them how in a very short piece they have forgotten all about the control they had after the “Waggle”. Another “Waggle” and trying to roll the boat individually.

In all easies the coach must not let the crew get cold. In cold weather, start with a short piece of firm paddling and make the easies short. In very cold weather have a short sharp piece of rowing, and on the easy get each oarsman to put his hands into his fork under his shorts, and hold them there for a minute or two. Then another short piece, and another hand warming, and then a longer piece and another easy. Then the hands will be warm. It is very painful if the hands get cold on a very cold day; a couple of sharp goes and this putting them in the fork always warms them, and they stay warm.

In ’86 or ’87 in the Cambridge Eight the coach rowed us the ’Varsity course. We started with our hands numb, and the whole eight had their hands numb all the time — not one of them could feel the oar at all. As the hands came round after easying, they were very painful. All that could have been avoided by warming the hands as stated. A coach should *never have long easies*, especially in cold weather.

After the second “Waggle” a short piece and “Feather high.” The higher the blade goes, the more the beginner is learning to get the balance of the oar on the rowlock, and when thoroughly efficient he will be able to balance it evenly, in the most workmanlike plane. To begin by trimming the blades to one level is the wrong way, and tends to destroy balance.

After the first short piece they should easy with blades balanced in the air. Then give the crew the “Lift! Lower!” At the word, “Lift!” strike, sharply and hard, on to the sill of the rowlock, to flick the blade into the air; at the word “Lower!” lower the blade smartly and controlledly (not allowing the blade to drop on to the water). Repeat this several times, and when the crew gets the blades well balanced in the air, row on from there.

Easying with the blades balanced in the air, and paddling off from there, is one of the best exercises in balance. In teaching these exercises the crew should be made to understand thoroughly that these positions have to be maintained in rowing, and that they are not merely show tricks. In October 1928 I told the Jesus four to practise balancing the blades in the air. Very soon they became so proficient that, the next time I saw them, they not only balanced the blades in the air, but waggled the riggers up and down without touching the water with the blades — a feat I would have thought impossible.

They did it as a trick and never realised that they had learned a wonderful control. If they had exercised it in their boat, it would never have rolled. Although they did the best time trial at Henley and were brought to the post very fit, they were yet beaten, on a rough day, by their want of watermanship. They could show this marvellous feat, but they did not use the balanced position rowing; they considered it only a trick.

I have often seen the same thing after the crew have “Waggled” and come to a good position of control, then rowed on twenty strokes and easied. The crew, instead of easying controlledly, let the boat go. The remedy for this is concentration.

EXERCISE FOR CONCENTRATION AND CLEVERNESS

To teach concentration, and for general improvement, I give several exercises.

One, which teaches control, is as follows: Start the boat four strokes rowing, then four paddling, the oarsmen to make the change without any word from the cox; then four paddling light, then four rowing. Keep on at these variations. This forces the crew to concentrate and count the strokes. It also teaches them to show a definite difference between the row, paddle, and paddle light, and so teaches control.

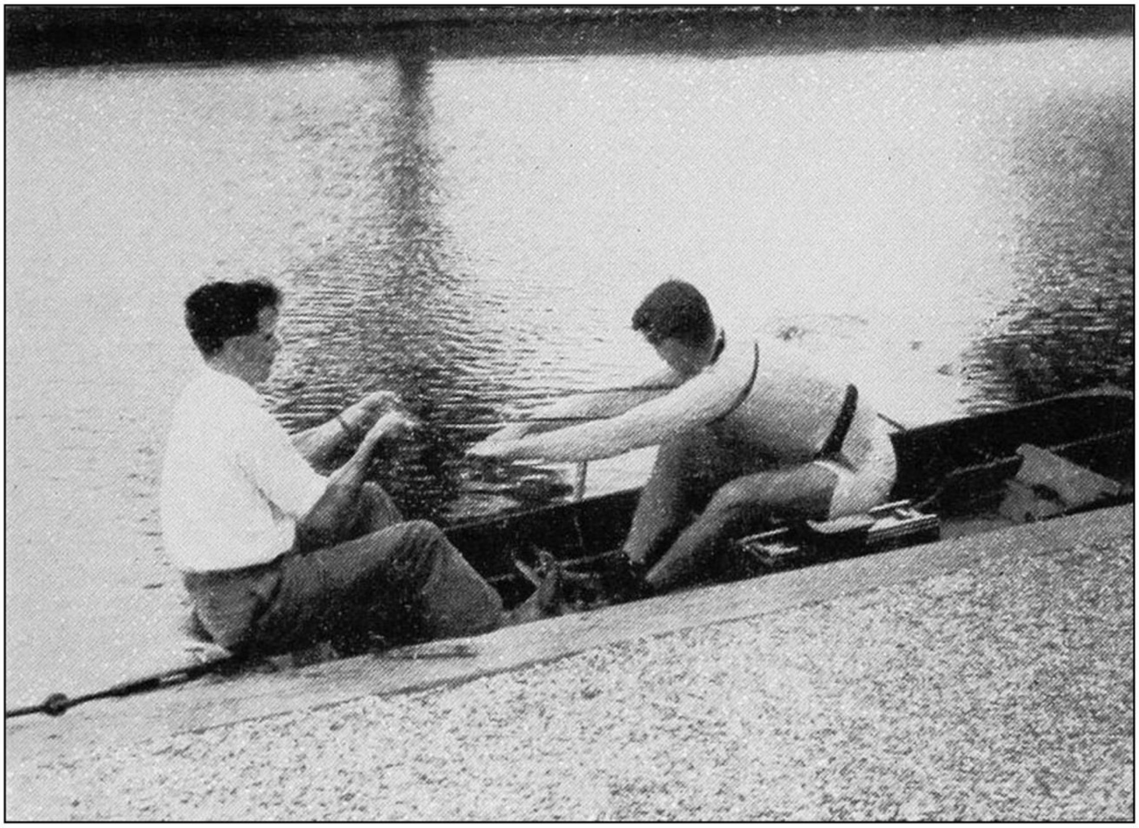
When explaining these variations, the coach should point out that paddling light is the finesse of rowing. When a man can paddle light with a true bell note (very light) with the blade cutting truly and evenly through the water (very easily) and with the water coming up with a swirl (very gently but true), that man can row his hardest better than any man who cannot paddle light so well.

In other words, to learn to paddle light is the quickest way to learn to row, but it is the most difficult thing to do. In 1885 our Jesus crew, paddling down to the final of the Grand, all eased up to the lightest of paddles — all against the method of those days, which was always paddle 32 (! ! !) strong. It struck me at once what a splendid thing it would be to teach this light paddling.

When I came back from Australia I started coaching for paddling light, and soon the other colleges adopted it. Then, to my horror, I heard coxes and coaches calling out “Slum.” Slum means slack, loaf, laze, etc. Paddle light means execute the stroke perfectly with the minimum application of weight. Slum and paddle light are farther apart than the poles.

Another good exercise is to row the riggers down strokeside for a few strokes, and then bowside. This is to give the crew the power to hold the riggers controlled, and especially to prevent the riggers going down on the other side. As soon as a boat drops on one side, it puts that side, more or less, out of action. A side are most inclined to pull their riggers down when rowing the boat round a corner (that is, the side with their oars outside the corner). The side with the oars inside should at once think of holding their riggers firm and so prevent the riggers going down on the other side.

The riggers going down on a side throws it out of action. When coming to a corner the cox should call on the outside oars, “Strokeside!” (or “Bowside!” according to which is outside). Then the outside oarsmen’s thought should flash to the bottom part of the loom of the oar to make sure that it makes contact with the thole, so as to counteract the natural tendency to hurry and start the stroke before the blade is truly squared. For if not squared, the blade would run down and pull the boat down.



Stearn & Sons

Teaching how to drive the weight off the stretcher, on to the rowing pin and off the slide.

At the same instant, the feet springing the weight off the stretcher, and the hands pulling their hardest at the oar, should flash into the outside oarsmen’s mind. The inside oarsmen should visualise their oars holding their riggers so that they cannot rise. Holding the boat firm, especially round a corner, is very important; it gives the outside oars something solid to row at. The cox’s, or coach’s, “Hold her down!” is a great help. Personally, when coming round Ditton at No. 7, I always held my rigger so that it would take a lot for the boat to go over.

A very good exercise to get over the trouble of only rowing on one side, and to improve the crew and each oarsman individually, would be for each oarsman to change to the other side when the boat is turned for home. I feel sure that rowing on both sides would improve everyone more quickly, and, eventually, they would attain a higher level. Always rowing on one side makes a man lop-sided, and has a clumsy tendency; the arms do not work the same, as the inside hand does the controlling, and rows with a similar movement to both arms when sculling. Changing over would give them both this movement.

When turning, 7 and Stroke could change, and 5 and 6, 4 and 3, Bow and 2. The change should be done by the bow-side stepping over the strokeside, who then move back. With this work many more scullers would be produced, because it gives a sculling action to each arm when rowing inside. Also, it would often help a man to get into a higher boat, as he may be the best oar in the boat, but unavailable when a vacancy occurs in a higher boat, as he cannot row the required side.

One of the first exercises, especially for beginners, after the “Waggle!” and “Lift! Lower!” is to tell the bow four to hold the boat steady and control it with their oars, and the stern four to come forward and square their blades, sitting with blades squared and balanced in the air. Once more impress on them the necessity of making sure that the lower part of the loom of the oar is firm against the thole. The coach should keep them sitting there a little time, whilst explaining that he wants them to row a stroke from that position to balancing the oar on the feather at the finish, *with the hands just started away an inch or two*. Then give the word: “To the finish, row!” and they row one stroke and sit with oars balanced in the air at the finish. Half a dozen strokes like that, and then do the same with the bow four, the stern four holding the boat steady.

Getting this controlling hold is a great education for beginners; sitting with the oars balanced at each end of the stroke is a great education in balance, and the pause at each end is an education in timing, and the whole art of timing is learning to take time to complete these two turns. Also, with four people holding the boat steady, it is so much easier for the beginner to get a decent stroke.

After having given stroke and bow fours a few turns of this, give stroke and bow six a few turns with only two of the crew holding her steady. Eventually give the whole eight these single strokes. With this, as a preliminary exercise, a crew of beginners can be taken out in the eight the first day after their fixed and moving tubbing. From this the crew could paddle on a few strokes together and gradually extend the length of the paddle.

Other good exercises for concentration are to make the crew paddle six strokes, the bow four feathering, and the stern four not feathering (rowing without feathering teaches cleverness). At the sixth stroke reverse, and those feather who were not, and the others do not feather. No word of command is necessary, but the crew change every sixth stroke. This teaches concentration, as the crew have to count the strokes, and any one forgetting to make the change gets a shock which soon gets him into a proper frame of mind for concentrating. The tendency for a crew with a coach is very much to go to sleep, hence all exercises to keep them concentrated are a great help to the eventual proficiency of the crew and of each man.

Another capital exercise for concentration and cleverness is to row three strokes through the water, and each fourth stroke in the air. The cleverness this imparts teaches each man to row without pressing on the sill at all. Yet another very good exercise is to start the boat rowing four strokes, then to paddle firm four strokes, next to paddle light four strokes, and then back to the row. Impress on the crew again that paddling light is the finesse of cleverness and the hardest thing of all to learn, and that the crew that can paddle light truest can row best. These variations are splendid for control.

At the easies balance the oars in the air. Crews are taking to this balance more and more, and I hope someday to see all crews sitting at the easies with the blades always balanced in the air, and rowing on from that position. In the “Paddle light”, the coach should explain again that the bell note should be true though gentle, and the same with the blade cutting through, and the swirl at the finish.

Throughout practise on the easy days, Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, the coach should ring the changes on these exercises. Another very good exercise is to get the crew to row a piece, starting each stroke with the elbow joint slightly bent. Many an oarsman does not get the elastic, even draw with arms straight. He locks the joint. Coaching to “keep the arms straight as long as possible” tends to make the arms rigid. The arms have got to start bending at once, as the oar has to be drawn evenly and continuously into the body.

The old fear of rowing with bent arms and pulling with them was that it would tire the arms by bringing them into use. It does not tire them, because it brings in the muscles of the back (and not the arms), and they apply the weight of the body. By rowing with the arms bent, the oarsman gets this elastic draw and can get it at full reach.

I have repeated rowing with bent arms, and I have repeated many other points and, more than any other, this one I am going to state: it takes much repetition to make an oarsman, and reading “Rowing Notes” frequently is the best thing of all.

Another good exercise is bringing the oar forward with the inside hand only, and rowing back with both hands sometimes, and with the outside hand only sometimes. Another exercise that makes for cleverness is to get the crew, one at a time, to take their sweaters off while paddling; this exercise adds very much to their confidence. I often race two crews taking sweaters off while paddling. The bow or stroke starts, and when his sweater is off he calls out “Off,” and the next follows, and so on.

These exercises all help towards cleverness, and are very good for rowing, but, remember, they do not propel the boat. The Australian golfer, Kirkwood [Joseph Henry Kirkwood, Sr., 1897-1970, member of the PGA Tour during the 1930s. – P.M.], could do some wonderful trick shots but, when he was leading, by several strokes, in the final round of the English Golf Championship, and could have won by playing the last few holes with a putter, he broke down and was beaten. [Kirkwood never won a major championship. – P.M.] Temperamental? Probably it was, because he had got to rely on his proficiency at trick shots, and this gave him a false confidence. So with rowing; all these exercises are very good, but the only way to get the right temperament is to do *plenty of long, hard work*, and so fit the muscles; and as the muscles become fitter rowing will become easier. Thus, once more, the oarsman’s slogan is, “Mileage makes Champions.”

CHAPTER 9

A Description of the Year's Work

First Term

This work is described on the Cam, but similar work can be done anywhere.

During the first few days, practise these different exercises with short pieces and frequent stops. The best day to begin the eight-oared work is on a Thursday, as the Sunday's rest comes best after about three days. These first few days should be devoted to these exercises and short pieces. In the second week begin steady work, taking, on the Cam, three easies in each direction for beginners. Of course, the first and second eights need take only one easy, and better to miss that. A first principle is that a boat should never "easy". It is a good thing always to make Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays easy days, bringing in these exercises, and plenty of paddling light. Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays make hard, harder, hardest, working up to Sunday's rest. This does away with that bugbear, staleness [overtraining. – P.M.], which is to a very great extent a mental attitude, brought on by making the work monotonous and uninteresting.

Varying the work and making it interesting, *and full of fun*, are recipes against staleness. Pointing out faults and drilling for body-form make for staleness. As I have said, Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, easy work and plenty of exercise for balance and control, etc.

The daily outing on the Cam is to Baitsbite [Lock] and back, about three miles each way. Clayhythe [Bridge] is about 2½ miles farther on, and Ely 16 or 18 miles, I forget which. So we will say Monday, Wednesday, and Friday of the second week (that is after a broken week) exercises and easy work. Tuesday introduce rowing ten strokes frequently; of course the crew will have been given a few strokes of rowing at times previously. Even from the first day, let them row ten strokes on the finish of the outward journey, and ten strokes to the boathouse, and always "row" these two finishing pieces.

These two pieces of rowing should be done on the same principle as the finish of the teaching of the bayonet exercise in the army, that is "go mad for ten minutes" — so in these two pieces let the crew go mad for ten strokes and "tiger" all they know. There should be no individual correction from the bank. In this "go mad" action they will eventually learn how to race better than all the coaches can teach them. On the Tuesday of this second week row four "tens" going down. On the return journey, paddle the course. Bring the crew to the starting post and row the first ten strokes; then paddle till round the corner. When straight after each corner row ten, and drop to the paddle, and row ten in to the Railway Bridge [About a mile downstream of the boathouses. – P.M.]. On the Thursday and Saturday do similar work to Tuesday, but 20 strokes to the finish Thursday and 30 Saturday.

The third week with the beginners I would put in two Clayhythes, and, with the more advanced crews, a Clayhythe and a row to Ely, these on Tuesday and Saturday. On the Thursday the beginners could row a Bridge to Ditch, say 1½ minutes, and a Reach, say 3 minutes. The first and second boats could do a Ditch, and race a Reach together. First boat on the outside, for there are two bends favouring the inside boat, and giving it half a length start ought to bring the crews together. Great care must be taken to see there is no way on either boat at the start.

Now we come to the fourth week. But, first, a word on turning a boat. Paddle on bow and three is the first order. Bow and three slog away to order and never look to see what they are doing, and just when the boat is crashing into the bank the order comes: "Easy bow and three, back her stroke and six," and this goes on till the rudder is crashing into the other bank. Then stroke and six are stopped, and bow and three row on, and the boat keeps rushing from bank to bank. I have often tried to introduce a right way to turn a boat, and this is it: "In time with stroke turn her, strokeside back, and bowside paddle on. Work easily, and turn her on her own axis, and see she does not roll." This turning exercise, if done properly, is exceptionally good to teach watermanship. It is not easy to hold the boat level in backwatering, especially with a swivel. To teach each oarsman to backwater and to feel he is pushing back evenly is a big step in his education.

It would be a very good thing in turning a boat every day, for some time, to turn it a complete circle, each way, so that each side gets a good deal of backwatering. Cox and coach and oarsmen should pay special attention to see the boat is held level, and turns on her own axis.

On Tuesday and Thursday of the fourth week, I would paddle the Lock to Lock [Baitsbite Lock to Jesus Lock, near Jesus College, upstream just past the boathouses. – P.M.] course with all the crews, putting in a good many 10's rowing. On Saturday I would let the 1st and 2nd boat row the Lock to Lock, and the 3rd and 4th boats row from the Railway Bridge with 1st and 2nd boat respectively. The third and fourth boats would start level on the far side from the towpath, and the other crews being tired they could hold them easily. They would have to drop behind before Ditton, and stay behind till round Post Corner [¾ mile to go to Baitsbite Lock. – P.M.], and then go for the front boat all they know. Not having rowed so far, they ought to be able to catch the 1st and 2nd boats down this last reach.

Fifth week: Tuesday, a Ditch and Reach, 1st and 2nd boats working together, also 3rd and 4th boats. Work two boats together always with only one coach. Working, and especially racing, boats together, concentrates the men on moving the boat, and that is far the best coaching. The best coach is the bows of a faster boat working behind a crew, so let the slower boat go ahead.

Thursday row a course, the 2nd and 4th boats picking up 1st and 3rd at Ditton, and then let 2nd and 4th row a course, 1 and 3 picking them up. In picking up 1st boat by 2nd let them start level, 1st boat, of course, moving in its course, so the 2nd boat standing still will lose about ¾ length before getting full way on, but being fresh it will come up fast for a minute. It will be on the outside, and the bend will help the boat rowing a course, so a good race will result. The 1st and 3rd boats, pacing the 2nd and 4th rowing courses, should start about half a length down.

The sixth week, easy work Monday and Tuesday. Then take the boats below Locks Wednesday to Saturday and give them bumping races. Let them paddle down to their starting posts quietly, coach silent. Start them a distance (50 yards) apart and let them race. If a crew is overlapped let it pull out, and give it 10 yards more start next night. Row to Clayhythe Railway Bridge, say about a mile. This gets the young ones accustomed to humping races and also it means four Clayhythes, a good long week.

The seventh week: on Tuesday row a Bridge to Ditch and Reach. On Thursday row a Course, and Saturday a Lock to Lock for all crews.

Eighth week: Tuesday, row a Lock to Lock; Thursday, paddle it with several "tens"; and Saturday, the crews all race a Lock to Lock. In this race start the 1st crew first, and each crew at 10 seconds interval. Give each crew a time allowance; that may vary according to the day's weather conditions, but I should say give 20 seconds allowance per boat. That is 1st boat 10, 2nd 20 secs., 3rd 40 secs., 4th 60 secs. A watch at the finish can take the times, starting it when the 1st boat passes the winning post, and marking down 10, and then taking the time of each boat as it passes and marking it down. If the times read 20, 30, 60, 90, they would be all level, as 2nd boat has 20 secs. allowance and started 10 secs. behind the first boat, and so on.

This Lock to Lock is the best race to work up for through the term, and the winners should get a prize. Working for a three-mile race is best, because crews all row a long course so much better than a short. It sets their timing because the distance steadies the desire to rush, and they row the last mile better than they would have thought possible. Being a race against the clock, all row over the same water, and where a breast race is apt to hurry young crews and destroy their rowing this clock row improves the rowing. Young crews are not ready for breast racing, but they have been given several gallops together up the Reach, and that is teaching them breast racing. The four eights bumping races are teaching them bumping racing, and so this varied experience is the best possible.

The above is a first term's work for a crew at Cambridge. But any boat club could frame its work on this schedule. Taking a Lock to Lock at 3 miles, a Course at 1¼ miles, Ditch 1½ minutes, and Reach 2½ minutes.

For the Putney Clubs [on the Tideway in London. – P.M.], of course, it is different. During the winter they can row only on Saturdays and Sundays. My system with them has been an hour's tanking, skipping, etc., at least two nights a week through the winter, and long Saturday and Sunday rows with plenty of galloping.

Working two crews together is much the best, and zigzag work is quite the most beneficial of all work for crews. To zigzag, start the two crews paddling against the tide then call on the outside crew to “paddle light”, and the inside crew to “row”. When the inside crew is well ahead let it steer out and the other steer in, then the now outside crew paddles light, and the other paddles firm till level. Then the crew that is inside rows and then steers out, the other paddling light, paddles firm and steers in and rows, and so on. A few miles of that is perfect work for crews, and for coxswains also. It makes them all “clever”.

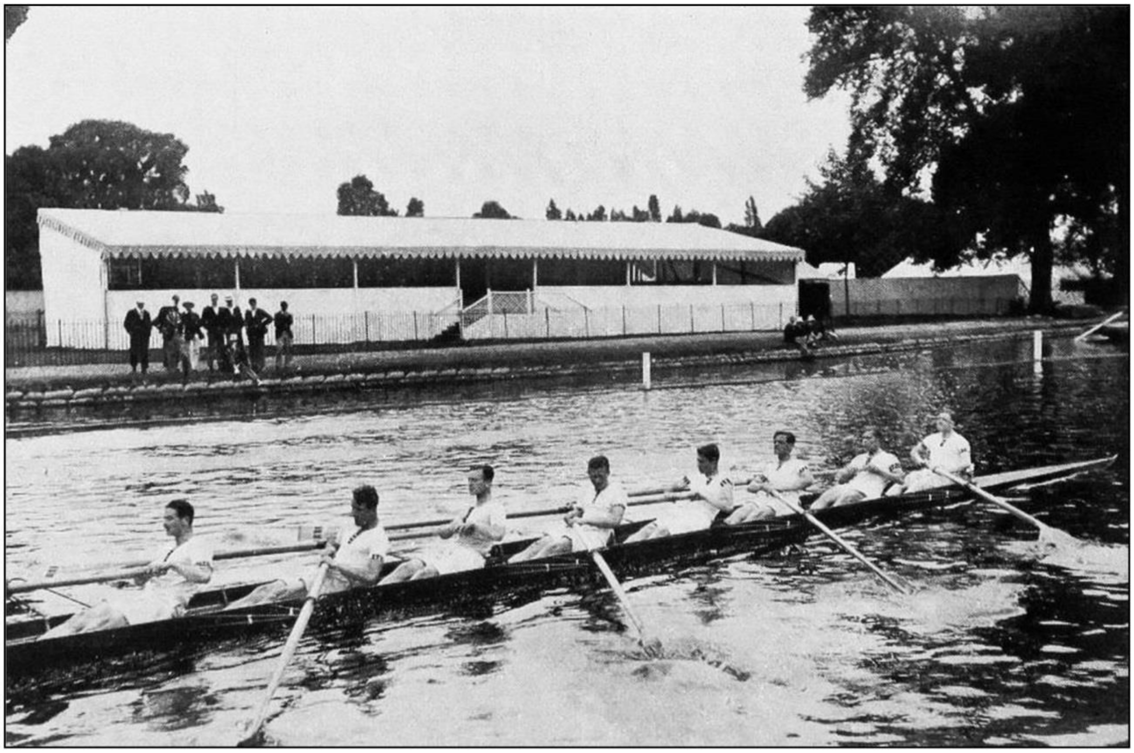
Good long Saturday rows, and longer on Sundays, are the best winter’s work, handicapping crews and racing them as much as possible. The ’Varsity course, four and a quarter miles, is ideal for finishing up the Sunday’s row. Get all the club crews together and start them fifteen seconds apart. Row to Putney Bridge from Mortlake, or the other way according to tide. If the second crew is catching the front crew, when about a length away, the front crew should take a short rest until just half a length up, and then row all out till caught. Directly the other crew passes it, it should drop to a strong paddle and wait till the next crew is half a length down and row again. It is very bad for a crew to keep chasing another crew which has passed it, for it is sure to scramble.

In the winter of 1922-3, three Thames crews worked from the Skiff Club above Teddington Lock [the upstream limit of the London Tideway. – P.M.]. They had only one night a week on the tank, and Saturday and Sunday in the boats. On the Saturday, two fours went out first and paddled up a couple of miles. They rowed about two minutes in to the boathouse, and a very fine race always ensued. They were two wonderful fours. One four was Ian [Fairbairn] stroke (a magnificent oar), Raymond 3 (a 13-stone Swiss, who was as powerful an oarsman as I ever saw), Jock Lane 2 (over 13 stone), and Charles Rew [Later coach of London Rowing Club. – P.M.] bow. Jock was very good in this boat, and they rowed the four most powerful blades I ever saw in one boat.

The other four used to have half a length start; they were Reggie Bare stroke, Donald Gollan 3, Jack Beresford 2, and [Edward C.] Chandler bow, as clever a four as ever sat in a boat. Unfortunately, Raymond had to go back to Switzerland, and did not appear at Henley; he was a great loss to the eight also, which won the Grand without him. Gollan elected to scull, also Jack, so the fours were broken up. [Fairbairn *fils*, Rew, Bare and Chandler were members of the 1924 Thames R.C. Grand Challenge Cup winner which also placed 4th for Britain in the 1924 Olympics. Beresford won the 1924 Diamond Sculls and the Olympic Men’s Singles title. – P.M.]

Then the eights would paddle and row up three miles, and paddle down, and do a couple of minutes into the boathouse with a handicap. On the Sunday the eights would paddle up to the Hampton Court Bridge, and the first eight would give the second eight a good start and catch them in about 2½ miles, when the Junior Eight would pick them up, and, being fresh, would fight it out with them to the Lock. That was more than a four miles’ hard gallop for the eight.

Then the fours would paddle up to the Molesey Lock and lunch there, and after lunch would chase each other down to the boathouse, so they did over 20 miles every Sunday, and a lot of it at the gallop. That was the best work ever done by any crew and



Thames Grand Crew, 1924

Coxswain John S. “Jack” Godwin 8 st. 5 lb. (not shown), Stroke Ian Fairbairn 12 st., 7 Arthur F. “Bones” Long 11 st. 9 lbs., 6 Charles H. Rew 11 st. 4 lbs., 5 Horace C. Debenham 12 st. 12 lbs., 4 Harold L. Morphy 10 st. 10 lbs., 3 Hugh W.M.P. Dulley 11 st., 2 Reginald G. Bare 11 st. 6 lbs., Bow Edward C. “Cherub” Chandler 11 st. 1 lb.

enabled them to win the [1923] Grand, though 21 lbs. a man lighter [11 st. 9¼ lbs.] than their opponents, and many of them only in their second year of rowing.

At Putney one can arrange the summer work like that laid down for the October rowing at Cambridge. Plenty of ’Varsity courses in the winter and early in the spring, and ½ mile, 1 mile, and 2 miles, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays in the summer, working crews together and giving a handicap. It is galloping together that brings crews on, and one can do a lot of this at Putney. When working together, the coach should handicap to make level races; this requires careful thought.

Working up for a long distance race is far the best for the October term’s work. Rowing a three-mile course is far easier than a shorter course, because the subjective mind acts on “Self-preservation is the first law of nature,” and eliminates the desire to rush, that is more apt to assert itself on shorter courses.

This means better timing, better rowing, and the boat going better, and, as the Lock to Lock course goes on, the oarsman is surprised to find that he is rowing better and better, and with increasing dash and length. Especially down the last reach, he is wonderstruck at the terrific spurt, and he is rowing with that glorious feeling of being like a piece of elastic, stretching and relaxing, and moving at 100 yards pace. The crew gets out on the bank, and lies down panting, and with a feeling of healthy exhaustion, and at peace with all the world. The fact of a long race being so good for one’s rowing was why

I started the H.O. River [Head of the River] Race at Putney, a most successful event, and all the oarsmen love it.

CHAPTER 10

Work for the Rest of the Year

Having worked up to a race of this sort a rest is indicated, and then the crews come back for the Lent Races, after doing exercises in the vacation. Now that the fixed seats are abolished in the Lent Races, all that is wanted is unlimited slides, and to allow all available to row, that is, all except the ’Varsity Boat. At present the first division first boats of the previous May races are barred, so, if a promising Freshman gets into his first boat in his first May, he is barred from rowing in the Lents, and, if not good enough for the ’Varsity Boat or Trial Eights, he gets no more racing till next May.

This means that the bulk of the most promising talent gets only five or six weeks’ rowing during the year, that is in the May Term of his second and third and fourth (if he comes up) years. The reason given for barring the first boats in the first division is so as to have plenty of coaches. This is all quite unnecessary; a man can row in one boat and coach another every day. Also, there is far too much coaching. The more a man is coached, the more he loses his power of using his initiative to help himself. I always let crews row a great deal without a coach and, as the foregoing shows, I only teach them how to teach themselves.

Once the Master of Jesus College was bicycling beside me and he said, “You say nothing and they improve every stroke.” I replied, “I don’t say anything, but I keep someone else from saying something, and they concentrate on working their blades.”

At all events, why not leave it to each college to keep certain men out to coach and not make a hard and fast rule? Many of the men thus stopped do not coach at all. Someday the rule will be altered, I hope.

The work for the Lent and May races should be similar to the October term. Plenty of long work at first, including two or three Lock to Lock rows, and Clayhythes, and to Ely and back at least once, then just the same as the October rowing, except courses instead of Lock to Lock at the end of practise.

The last week should be: Tuesday, Bridge to Ditch and Reach rows; Thursday, three minutes from each crew’s post; Saturday, the Bridge to Bridge course. Monday of the race week a minute from each crew’s post, and Tuesday two minutes and several bumping race starts.

The above is work for bumping races on the Cam. Other clubs training for the summer’s racing should work on similar lines. Plenty of long slow work at first, working two crews together always. On the Tideway or up river against the stream one cannot do better than plenty of zigzag work, with its varying from light to firm, to row frequently. Coming down stream the crews should paddle together with much paddling light, and several breaks into a row of ten strokes, and finish up the last minute with a row, letting the second crew have a slight start.

Then half a mile, one mile, and one and a half miles the second week; and one and two miles and a ’Varsity course the third and fourth week, on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. Back again to half a mile Tuesday, one mile Thursday, and one and a half miles Saturday. It is very beneficial for clubs to work on Sundays, as in the winter, and rest Monday. Clubs do not get enough time in the evenings, and long work on Saturdays and Sundays helps them very much.

In handicapping for the half mile, the mile, etc., allow about a length to half a mile, and say 20 seconds over the ’Varsity course.

Nowadays there are many regattas before Henley, and these are the best preparation for Henley. College crews going to Henley Regatta should go to the Marlow Regatta. After the May races they have their festivities, but a short outing every evening with a few stake-boat starts, starts of 10 strokes daily, arid one for a minute from a stake-boat, would be all to the good to get ready for the breast start in regattas. I strongly advise crews to go to the Marlow Regatta and race there, doing some paddling about at Henley, and paddling the boat down to Marlow on the Thursday (or Wednesday), and rowing the Marlow course a couple of times in practise, and several stake-boat starts.

Having been in training for the last few days, on Saturday night and Sunday let the crews have plenty of beer, too much rather than too little, because with the hot weather one needs much fluid.

Now we come to the most dangerous week, the week before Henley. Oarsmen have done a lot of work. The boats are going fast, and so each row takes more out of them: the climate can be very relaxing. The crews are working twice a day, instead of once, and watching other crews rowing. All this tends to take a lot out of a crew; so they must be careful not to do too much work. Recently a London crew, as fine a crew (8 and 4) as was ever seen at Marlow, went for breaking records at Henley, tempted by the fast conditions during the week, with the result that they were suffering from very tired hearts in the regatta.

Row the eight back to Henley from Marlow on Monday, and, if working in fours, a light paddle in the four in the evening. Tuesday, if the men are rowing in eights and fours, row the fours a half course in the morning, and the eight a half course in the afternoon. Thursday, row the last half of the course in the fours, and a mile in the eight. Saturday, full course in the eight, and light work in the four.

Only one outing should be taken daily in each boat if rowing in eights and fours. If only in eights, then paddle the eight round the island and home in the mornings, and work as above in the evenings. This is quite enough; two outings in each boat only tend to throw the race away. Saturday’s work should be finished by mid-day, and let the draw guide the next two days’ work. If an easy heat on Wednesday, Monday and Tuesday can be light work, a minute in each if rowing in eights and fours, or a minute twice if rowing in eights only, both days.

If a hard race is expected, two minutes (a barrier) on Tuesday in the eight, and get several stake-boat starts. It is a good thing to get the crew away from Henley from Saturday till Monday — let them go home if possible — and finish the Saturday's work before lunch, and Monday's work should begin after lunch.

When starting a race, remember that gaining a bow canvas at the start takes a lot out of a crew, and will probably mean losing two lengths the other end. Get off nicely and get well into your stride, but don't overdo the start, use your head and never row yourself silly; always have just that little left for a last sprint.

After Henley, college crews cannot do better than go to the other regattas, or, if oarsmen cannot go with college crews, they should get places in club crews. The experience is invaluable for their next year's work. They will learn more during the three weeks of regattas than in all the rest of the year's rowing.

It is best to take the next year's October four to these regattas if possible. Long paddles twice a day, with a minute rowing Wednesday morning and afternoon, two minutes Thursday, and row the boat up to the course Friday, is the sort of work wanted. It is a very enjoyable time, and very good for next year's rowing. Also having to find their way about is a very good experience for undergraduates who, so to speak, have their oars put into their hands at college. It is going out into the world and making men out of boys.

When I returned to England in 1897, I advised Cambridge men to row in these regattas, and three or four of them did, and in 1900 Cambridge reaped the benefit, and turned out its best crew.

In the vacations, and always, oarsmen should take plenty of exercise, conditioning the body and fitting the muscles; it helps very much towards the next term's rowing. People do not realise nearly enough how much healthy work in the vacation helps. It is a case of getting the muscles fit. The best exercise of all is the natural one of walking. This should be done at a good swinging pace, not rushing along, but swinging along at four miles an hour.

A walking tour is ideal. My first summer in England I walked from London to Inverness, and then walked shooting for several weeks. When I got to Edinburgh, I had a Turkish bath, and the shampooer remarked on the fit condition of the muscles of my back, my arms, and my chest. It would not strike one at first that walking brings these muscles into play, but when one is swinging along walking one swings the arms freely, and thus these muscles are all working.

For instance, if one walks 20 miles a day and steps a yard, and taking one mile as 2,000 yards, then one takes 40,000 steps and 40,000 swings of the arms, or 20,000 of each arm. If a man were to swing his arms 40,000 times without walking, he would realise he was exercising the muscles.

Constant exercise is what is wanted, and one cannot always do 20 miles a day walking, so one must get other exercises. It is the draw muscles one wants to condition more than the legs. The draw muscles are those that pull the oar, and so apply the weight to move the boat.

A very good exercise for these muscles is to pull the body up, say, on the bedroom door. This should be done night and morning constantly. If one cannot pull the body right up, so as to look over the top of the door at first, pull a little way up, and repeat this ten times, and then rest a bit, and another ten. Keep at this for twenty minutes morning and night. Soon it will be possible to draw oneself up, and the number of times one can do so will keep on increasing, and as one improves so one is an improved rowing machine.

Pulling up or lifting weights should be done with a spring, *and on no account should one struggle*. If the springing movement does not carry one through, stop, and avoid all struggle. This same springing movement is all one must do rowing, and *when a man can spring the blade right through without effort* he is on the right track.

I remember the day I found I could spring the blade right through every stroke over the 'Varsity course and *never tired a muscle*. Several old oars have told me they came to the same thing; 50 pulls up eventually, in breaks, morning and evening, would change the oarsman from a 10 horse power to a 100 horse power machine, and if he got his muscles thoroughly fit he would at once be a perfect oar. I am sure if the muscles are perfectly fit they would apply the weight correctly at once.

A very good exercise is to get two dumb-bells, say 20 lb. weight, and put them on the floor and spring them up from there to as high above the head as possible. Down to touch the floor again and spring up again, just tapping the floor and springing. Do this say ten times at first, and have several tens, so as to do it eventually a hundred times daily. But don't struggle, just spring the dumbbells up. If they won't go right up at first, on no account struggle at them, but keep at them, just giving the lively spring and draw.

This also conditions the belly muscles, which take the reaction, and are the most important muscles to condition. It is the constant work that tells. Bill Beach, a blacksmith, was the finest sculler I ever saw. He won the world's championship seven times, beating, amongst others, Hanlan and Gaudaur [Jacob "Long Jake" Gaudaur, 1858-1937, raced Bill Beach for the World Professional Singles title on the Thames in London in 1886 with Fairbairn in attendance. Gaudaur won the World title in 1896. – P.M.]. Both of these, I think, would have beaten any other sculler except Searle, who was, they say, even better than Beach, and Searle's education was rowing a heavy boat daily, as a boy, five or six miles to school and the same distance back. That, of course, is the best exercise of the lot for the man destined for boat-racing. But even if one cannot get long daily rows in the vacation in a heavy boat, still the other exercises in the bedroom, morning and evening, will help very much, and a daily sharp walk of an hour will keep one fit.

Bob Fitzsimmons [Robert James "Bob" Fitzsimmons, 1863-1917. – P.M.], another blacksmith, won the World's heavyweight boxing [title in 1896]. He weighed under 12 stone, and beat a 14 stone man. I have no doubt if one looks one will find many blacksmiths very good athletes. The general idea is that the blacksmith is a clumsy, muscle-bound, slow man, but boxing and sculling are very clever and very fast movements, and these two blacksmiths are living proofs of the value of working heavy weights to become proficient at fast work. Since writing the above I have just read that Germany's champion boxer, [Max Schmeling, 1905-2005. – P.M.] now the World's champion, is a blacksmith.

Of course, it is knack, not "brute" strength, that moves weights, and knack means timing truly the movements of the body to move the weight. The up and down movement of lifting dumb-bells, up from the floor to full stretch, and down and tapping the floor, and up again with a spring, continuously, is very similar to the timing movement of rowing. We used to work lighter dumb-bells at school, and shoot them up and down, eventually several hundred times. I have often asked oarsmen to do these daily practises in the vacation, but they don't because they have not realised the value of it.

Skipping [rope], morning and evening, is another very good exercise to keep one fit. It works all the muscles and improves one's timing. My old friend Hutch told me he lifted a 56-lb. weight 200 times at a time to full reach. Twenty years of rowing had fitted the muscles to that extent (he did not do much practise with the weights whilst rowing). This shows that rowing conditions one for lifting weights.

I did very little weight lifting but, like Hutch, a great deal of rowing. After my rowing days I lifted a 110-lb. dumb-bell to full stretch. It was in the Melbourne Athletic Club, and was recorded in their books as the only time an amateur ever did lift it. Professional weight-lifters do much more.

Once I was able to perform an exceptional feat because of the muscular development resulting from rowing. Two men were loading their wagon with bales of wool, the two working a bale. I chaffed them, and said I could load a wagon by myself. To my surprise I did! The bales weighed about 400 lbs. apiece — 3 cwt. 2 qrs. 8 lbs. was the recognised weight. One had two hooks with which to grip the bales, and trundled them along, then up a sloping plank to the wagon. The bottom tier was all right, but after that, one had to lift them up straight on to the next tier, and that was fine work. I think there were about 10 tons to the load, so I had to lift fifty bales, which I managed *without an effort*. These are illustrations of how rowing fits one for weight lifting, and so weight lifting will fit one for rowing.

Finally, do your best every stroke, and you will enjoy every stroke, and eventually you will come to enjoy a losing race, and then you will have carried out the maxim:

"This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man."
[Shakespeare, "Hamlet", Act 1, Scene 3]

AN ABC OF ROWING

A is for Action,
Which must easily be done.

B is for Boat,
Which smoothly must run.

C is for Crew,
Who together must row.

D is for Dash,
Which makes the boat go.

E is for Ease,
The hall mark of pace.

F is for Feet,
Used to make the boat race.

G is for Gather
On your stretcher to strike.

H is for Hands
To draw as you like.

I is that Idol,
Perfect Form ever more.

J is that Joker,
The “body-form” oar.

K is for Kicking
The stretcher like Hell.

L is for listen:
The boat runs well.

M is the Maxim
Which lies under all:
“If you can’t do it easy
You can’t do it at all.”

N is for Neatness,
Not flashness, nor show.

O is for Oar,
Which you must learn to row.

P is for Poise:
The Foundation of Time.

Q is for Quickness,
To which you must climb.

R is for Ring,
The bell note sublime.

S is for Spring,
If elastic, ’twill do.

T is for Timing,
Must be mechanically true.

U is for Use
The oar as a friend.

V is for Vigour,
Which to victory will tend.

W is for Water,
One drives with a hit.

X is for Excellence.
Strive ever for it.

Y is for Years
Through which you attain
Perfection by rowing
Again and again.

Z is for Zebra,
Whose stripes represented
By your blade in the water
Will make you contented.